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THROUGH THE MIST

BY JEANIE HERING



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THROUGH THE MIST



THROUGH THE MIST

BY

JEANIE HERING

AUTHOR OF

"HONOUR AND GLORY," "GOLDEN DAYS," "GARRY," "LITTLE PICKLES," ETC.

"In the cruel fire of Sorrow
Cast thy heart, do not faint or wail;
Let thy hand be firm and steady,
Do not let thy spirit quail;
But wait till the trial is over,
And take thy heart again:
For as gold is tried by fire,
So a heart must be tried by pain!

Time and Tide had thus their sway,
Yielding, like an April day,
Smiling noon for sullen morrow,
Years of joy for hours of sorrow!



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TO
THOMAS FAED, Esq., R.A.

FOR AULD LANG SYNE
AND AULD ACQUAINTANCE SAKE.

JEANIE HERING.





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THROUGH THE MIST.

CHAPTER I.

RED CLOAKS.

"DULCIE DUNCAN, do you intend to kill yourself?—oh, Dulcie!"

A young girl, lissom and graceful, was standing on a grey moss-covered rock, and clinging with one hand to the big overhanging ferns, whilst the waters of the burn rushed around her.

"Dulcie Duncan!" she called again, throwing her full red cloak back from her shoulder at the same time.

A crashing, cracking sound of rotten branches and sticks, and a small fall of stones, was the only answer, when all at once, down with the falling sticks and stones came another young figure, in a like red cloak, and peeping through the tall ferns carried in one arm, her voice rang out clearly above the sound of falling waters, "Oh, Ruby, look at me!"

And both wearers of red cloaks went into ecstasies of laughter, only because a round hat had been flattened out of all shape, and knocked by the birken boughs rakishly over a pair of bright eyes.

All looked so peaceful and undisturbed on the bonnie burnside this autumn afternoon; there was a golden glory of colour in the withering bracken and the brown red heather; down slanting-wise through the wood came the gleaming sunlight, casting weird shadows of trees which were becoming bare, and lighting up the whole scene

with a dreamlike beauty which may leave with you one of those impressions which never fade.

On a venerable grey moss-grown stone in the burn, stood these two graceful, well-made Highland lassies, Ruby and Dulcie Duncan. There was clearly no standing-room for two, and after vainly clinging together, Ruby, who for the last second or two had been balancing herself on nothing particular, fell with a sudden splash into a clear pool of water, taking her ferns, tightly grasped, with her.

This was, however, only the signal for renewed peals of laughter, when all at once, from the high banks above them, sounded—

Crush—crash—rush!

And whilst the girls were looking round in astonishment, a figure disengaged itself from the birch trees and brambles by some energetic movements down the bank, and then they saw a tall, bearded man in knickerbockers, with a pencil in his mouth, who, in his eager goodwill to assist, was heralding his coming by a shower of loose sticks and stones dislodged thereby.

“Wait one moment, ladies, I will assist you,” he cried.

But Ruby objected to help; she was proud of her sure-footedness and of her agility, and valiantly she scrambled to her feet and sprang on to a stone just as the stranger reached them.

“If you will give me your hand and allow me to assist you up the bank,” he said. “Ah, I see you are a good climber, but why not allow me the pleasure of assisting you in an emergency?”

Ruby looked a forlorn and dripping object enough, as she solemnly stood on the rock, but she said, somewhat coldly and distantly, “Thank you, I can manage quite well; besides, my hands are all wet.”

At this there was the whisper of a laugh from Dulcie, who was perched on another rock, silently watching and listening; and then she added, “Come, Ruby, we must go home to tea.”

Then they all three scrambled up the rough bank together, meanwhile the stranger told them that he

had been sketching the rocks above the burn, and for some time watching their scrambles, and admiring the red glimmer of their cloaks amongst the ferns and mosses.

Somewhat to their surprise, the stranger continued to walk beside them after the proper path was reached, saying that he would see them further through the wood.

The two girls looked at one another, and hesitated as they walked on ; and then Ruby said that they must wish him good evening, and hurry home.

"Then, good evening, ladies," he said, in his pleasant, joyous voice. "I trust that you do not consider me officious in coming to your aid unasked."

"Oh no, thank you," said Ruby hastily; "it is because of——"

"Because of Auntie Jean," put in Dulcie, speaking for the first time.

The stranger seemed to be amused, for he smiled ; and Dulcie's cheeks waxed rosy as he raised a ruffianly-looking hat, and disclosed square, broad brows, grizzly hair, clearly cut features, and deeply-set, keen eyes ; then bowing, he said, "I am glad of the chance which has favoured our making acquaintance ; I only hope I shall make Auntie Jean's acquaintance under as favourable auspices."

And then they parted, and the artist threw himself on to a cushion of moss, and with a smile watched the hurrying red cloaks disappearing through the wood.

For some time the two girls walked silently along the old peat-road towards home, but when they were very safely out of earshot, Dulcie, with a merry sparkle in her eyes, said, "What a mercy we got rid of him ; he might have walked all the way home with us, and just fancy what Auntie Jean's and Auntie Bell's faces would have been, if he had done so !"

After this they began to wonder who he could be, for in that distant, northern little Isle of Arran, where they lived, the advent in late autumn of an utter stranger was a thing to wonder and to marvel at. When home was in

sight, Ruby suddenly said, "Dulcie, what could he mean by saying he hoped he should make Auntie Jean's acquaintance under the same favourable auspices that he did ours? Now, only fancy our Auntie Jean sitting in a burn—just think of it!"

But we must precede the two girls, and manage to arrive at home before them.

A short distance from the village of Brodick stands a plain, ugly old house, which, much to the discomfort of strangers and visitors, went by the name of "Tigh-na-Beinne; and the strangers and visitors being apt to consider this "beyond them," fell into the way of calling it "the House on the Hill," or "the Hill House," which was near enough to the literal Gaelic, which meant "the house on the moor." The walls of the house were so painfully well whitewashed, that on a sunny day they made your eyes ache to look at them, whilst on a winter's day they looked equally cold; neither were there pretty flowers and shrubs about it to break the lines and soften ugliness. Before the house was a large piece of rough grass, and a straight drive on one side of it leading up to the house; but behind it, up the hillside, rose a bonnie fir-tree wood, always fresh, always cool, always charming.

In this house lived the Misses McInnes, who were much respected, and looked up to by friends and neighbours. In person they were much alike, but in character they differed widely. Miss Jean, the elder, with her determination of purpose and strong will, was the master spirit; while Miss Bell, from long habits of obedience to the stronger will, and a happy admiration of her sister, showed at all times a loving-hearted humility, and a sweet and ever ready thought for others.

Long ago there had been a third and younger Miss McInnes who had always been called the "wee one" by the other two, and in time the "wee one" married, at which Miss Jean was greatly offended and Miss Bell somewhat alarmed. But long life was not given to the "wee one," or to her husband either, for she married very young and went to India, and before three years had

passed, both were lying in their graves, and two bit lassies were on their road from India to their only relatives in Scotland. Since then, years had gone, and the others that had come found these twins healthful, blooming, well-grown lassies, whilst their mother in her distant grave remained for ever and aye in her sisters' remembrance as the "wee one."

The house on the hill-side possessed two "public" rooms, as the sitting-rooms are called in the North, and respectively known as the big parlour and the wee parlour, the latter being the chief living room of the family, where they had their meals, cut out and sewed their needlework, knitted stockings, did their accounts, and kept little saucers full of small messes of odds and ends, hooks and eyes, needles and pins, thimbles, &c. ; many a happy hour had this household, which for such long years had been a household of women, passed in this wee parlour.

The big parlour was only used on Sabbaths, and when there was company to tea ; then Miss Jean and Miss Bell sat on either side of the fire, resplendent in best caps and black silk dresses, and knitted stockings, in a much more stately way than usual, owing, probably, to the combined dignity of dress, cap, and room.

We find both sisters sitting by the fire in the wee parlour ; they were fair, plain women, with freckles and sandy hair, and although in this respect ill-favoured by Nature, endowed by the same mother with hearts true as steel, and a simple kindliness of thought ; and as they had devoted themselves to the wee one, were they now devoting themselves to the wee one's bairnies.

The tea-things were on the table, and the two aunts, with their knitting-needles, established between them and the fire. "Mercy me !" said Auntie Bell, as the kettle, which had hitherto been singing away merrily in the exuberance of its spirits on the hob, spouted a splotch of boiling water into the fender, and the cat was sleeping in undesirably close vicinity to the falling water. "Mercy me, sister, see the cat !" And Miss Bell started up, but was undecided which to seize first, the kettle or the cat ;

when Miss Jean darted before her, clutched the kettle, and placed it further from the fire with a jerk, at the same time pushing the cat aside with her foot.

"See that now, Bell," said Miss Jean. "That is just a specimen of you and your ways ; you never could make up your mind in a moment, never think of a thing and do it then and there, always hesitating and undecided ; I wonder that you ever made up your mind to come into the world at all."

"How can you be so profane, sister? I was just fearing that the poor cat would be scalded."

"And so she might have been if her safety had depended upon you." Then the clock struck, and she added, "Six o'clock and those lassies not home yet ; they are just daft with their ferns and burns."

Then they knitted on silently, for they had spent their lives in thus quietly working together, and in the winter there was never much to say, when the summer visitors and tourists had left the glens and mountains to the islanders, in whose simple life events and strange circumstances were few and far between. So that Auntie Jean and Auntie Bell each set up their own particular hobby and interest, over which they could always, more or less mildly, excite themselves.

Auntie Jean's hobby was their own little farmyard stock, consisting of a small army of chickens, one cow, two pigs, and some ducks. Auntie Bell was always interested in the accounts of these animals, but she did not pretend to understand the mysteries of managing them as Jean did. Her own especial interest was the steamboat, its passengers and parcels, which came three times a week to the island, and Miss Bell was always on the quay, faithfully, as the day came round, and she would get a chat with this one, and a newspaper from that one, as well as a general knowledge of what was going on in their island home. The great world beyond was but of secondary interest. As time went on, she had come to regard her own presence on the quay as a sort of duty to be done, and afterwards she would return to relate at great length to those at home all the news that she had

been able to collect, and which Miss Jean, although she was greatly interested in it, would call "havers."

They had three objects of mutual interest—their two nieces and the cat, whose name was Adam.

All at once the hall door was heard to open and shut, and merry voices were laughing in the hall; and then Dulcie, whose cheeks were vieing with her red cloak, put her head in at the door and said, "Oh, auntie, I hope we are not late for tea; Ruby tumbled into the burn, and she couldn't be more wet than she is. We will be down in a moment." Then the door shut, and feet were heard pattering up the stairs.

"Daft lassies," said Auntie Jean; then lifting the teapot from the hob, where it had been "infusing," whilst Miss Bell hurried upstairs to watch over Ruby, and see that all damp garments were really put off. In a very short time she returned with the intelligence that they would be down almost immediately—that they were "doing their hair."

"Deed I might have known that," said Auntie Jean, "they are always doing their hair. It is my belief that that is the only lesson they ever really took to in Edinburgh."

The two girls had been educated at a boarding-school in Edinburgh, the only apparent result of which was (according to Auntie Jean), that they could play a little on the pianoforte and sing tolerably; that they were for ever "doing their hair;" and lastly, now that school-days were ended for ever, they had an enormous correspondence with a number of girls whose names were all that were known to Auntie Jean and Auntie Bell.

CHAPTER II.

THE WEE PARLOUR.

In a very short time the cosiest-looking tea-party imaginable was gathered about the table in the wee parlour; Auntie Jean pouring out the tea, and Auntie

Bell drinking any number of cups of it, and **always trying** to catch her sister, in a moment of absence of mind, to pour out another cupful for her, without the remark, "Why, Bell, you have had your third cup;" or, "Well, Bell, I certainly would not advise you to drink five cups of tea."

Upstairs, the girls had been consulting as to who would best tell the story of the adventure. Each one, however, had wished the other to undertake the matter, as it was uncertain how Auntie Jean would receive the news. Wishing to propitiate her, therefore, in the first place, Dulcie artfully began: "How many eggs did the hens lay to-day, Auntie?"

"Five," was the answer.

"I am sure it is very kind of them to go laying like that," remarked Dulcie.

"Most people's hens are leaving off laying now the weather is changing," said Auntie Jean, with some pride, but it only requires a little management, and some meat cut up in their food."

"I know everybody is jealous of our hens," continued Dulcie; and—oh, by-the-by, Ruby had such an adventure in the burn to-day; but you tell it, Ruby."

Now this was mean of Dulcie, and Ruby looked across at her; but in her eyes was the merry mischievous look of which Ruby was somehow afraid, and somewhat hesitatingly she began, "Yes, I fell into the burn; but it was Dulcie's fault, she would stick on a stone as if she were glued to it, and of course I couldn't stand very long on nothing, so in I went, sitting down in the water."

"Mercy me!" said Auntie Bell.

"Great patience!" said Auntie Jean; adding, "I suppose you did not stop sitting down; you got up directly."

"Well, as soon as I could, but——"

There was a pause, which made Dulcie break into a merry laugh, and then she took up the story:—"Whilst she was sitting in the burn looking ever so ridiculous, a great tall man, with the biggest beard you ever saw, came down the bank like an elephant, rattling the stones and sticks down before him; and he called out to us, with a pencil in his mouth all the while, that we were

to stop and he would help us, but we managed without him."

"And very kind it was of the poor man, I am sure, to help you," began Miss Jean; "who, in the name of patience, could he have been?"

Auntie Bell was more excited, saying, "He did not land here by the boat; he must have gone to Lamlash, and walked over the hill."

Who he could be, and why visiting Arran at that unusual season? formed the chief subject of conversation during tea, and Auntie Jean decided that he must be either boarded by his friends in an out-of-the-way place for some reason or other, or that he must be one of those erratic mortals known as artists. It is the custom in the North, when any one takes hopelessly to drinking, to board them in some out-of-the-world retired spot, where there is but little opportunity for the further indulgence of their vice, and where they have at least a chance of reformation. People were also boarded out in this way for harmless madness—when they were, in Highland phrase, "just not all there." And as for artists, of whom the island had naturally had no little experience, they were entirely given over to such eccentricities, that in Auntie Jean's opinion it fell little short of downright madness; the new-comer was therefore to be avoided and feared.

It was very shortly after tea, before they had settled themselves down to their several employments, when the hall-door bell was heard to ring with a resolute peal which echoed through the stillness of the house.

"Mercy me!" said Auntie Bell.

"Great patience!" said Auntie Jean; "who will that be at this hour of the night?" and the two ladies let their work fall on their knees and their hands on their work.

Was it instinct, or was it a presentiment, which made both Ruby and Dulcie start at the sound, and silently meet each other's eyes, whilst Barbara was opening the door, and steps and voices were heard in the hall?

Barbara entered the room with a card in her hand,

which she gave to Miss Jean, whispering confidentially the while, "Thon man's in the lobby; he tell't me ta gie ye this,—but the mercy kens wha he is."

Miss Jean held the card at some distance from her, and having twice altered its position, she read, "Mr. Harold Pierrepont."

The girls listened eagerly to the new sound. Miss Jean read it with a far-off consciousness stealing over her,—a long-forgotten dream of the past,—and yet she was all at sea.

Miss Bell's behaviour was strange; she twice tried to speak, and then she said, "Harold Pierrepont, Jean!—mercy me!"

And then Miss Jean said slowly, "Harold Pierrepont! can it be the same?"

Whilst Barbara, in intense appreciation of the excitement, remarked, "Did iver ye see the like!"

Dulcie broke the silence:—"You had better ask Mr. Harold Pierrepont in."

Nobody stirred. Then Dulcie rose, saying, "Really, every one seems to have forgotten how to behave;" and, opening the door wide, she said clearly to the stranger, who was standing in the hall, "Will you walk in, please?"

And the stranger who walked in was bigger than most people who entered the wee parlour; his voice alone, or his boots, or his beard, seemed to fill it. Auntie Jean rose with an eager look of surprised inquiry, and held out her hand to the visitor, and for a moment or two they held each other's hands and looked fixedly at one another, and then he said, "Miss McInnes, do you remember me after all these years and years? I should have known you anywhere!" whilst she, with less politeness, remarked, "Remember Harold Pierrepont! ay, well enough, but you've changed altogether; if it had not been for your eyes and nose, you might have been the Emperor of Russia for all I should have known."

Then the visitor turned to Miss Bell, and with both hands took hers, saying, "Miss Bell, what a real pleasure it is to see old friends again after all this weary while; it

makes me wish I had changed as little as you have during the time."

But Auntie Bell was as one in a dream. Twenty long years, bringing all their changes and all their sorrows, had rolled away since these two had last looked on one another; but not until now did each feel what the roll of years had done, or how completely they had separated Past and Present.

"And wee Mary——" began Auntie Jean.

"I know—I have heard," answered Harold Pierrepont: "how well I remember seeing her and Duncan on board the India-bound ship. I think that was the last time that I saw you, Miss Bell, and Miss Jean."

How well each one knew that! whatever else may be forgotten, last meetings, last partings, last words, last looks, remain printed so deeply, that even Time's touch cannot efface them.

Then Harold Pierrepont's eyes wandered to where Ruby and Dulcie were standing together, looking on with eager curiosity. "Those are wee Mary's daughters," began Auntie Jean; "that is Ruby, and that is Dulcie Duncan."

And whilst he shook hands warmly as an old friend with them, he inquired which was the elder of the two.

"Auntie Jean says Ruby is the eldest," said Dulcie; "only it does not much matter, because we are twins, and then we have the same coloured hair, and there is not a quarter of an inch between us, and this is how we are always shown off;" and laughingly they stood back to back; then, turning their faces round, Harold Pierrepont thought he had seldom seen a prettier picture. Alike, they each had quantities of wavy brown hair, blooming complexions, little merry mouths, and white teeth; only their eyes were of a different shade, but in each they were lovely. Ruby's eyes were of a clear dark hazel, and Dulcie's were darkest, deepest brown, like bits of soft velvet. Those beautiful eyes were all that strangers could find to distinguish them, and yet more difference lay in their expression than in their colour.

Ruby's eyes were always peaceful, Dulcie's full of life and mischief.

It was a strange evening, and a somewhat uncanny one to Miss Bell, and it was all that she could do to believe that it was Harold Pierrepont in the flesh whom she saw before her ; and their talk was a strange mixture of bits of the past and of the chief topics of public interest of the day. It is always so, more particularly when people have been intimate friends and they meet after long absence : it is so difficult, so impossible at first to take up all the dear old threads of interest where they left them, that they shyly fight them off with things uninteresting to each.

"Do you often go rambling up the burns as I saw you doing to-day?" inquired Harold Pierrepont ; "and do you either, or both of you, sketch?"

"We are always scrambling about the burns when we have time," said Dulcie ; "we do not sketch, because it is too difficult ; but will you show us your sketches? Perhaps you have a book which belongs to the pencil which you had in your mouth when you spoke to us to-day?"

He did not speak for a moment, and Dulcie knew that he was asking himself how it was that he had spoken to them with a pencil in his mouth ; and, finally, he suddenly recollected himself and said, "There is nothing worth looking at in it ;" and then he turned and added, "Miss Bell, what have you been doing in the sketching way lately?"

"Oh, I never attempt anything of the kind now," said Miss Bell, deprecatingly ; whilst the two girls with one voice cried, "*Auntie Bell—sketch!*"

"Do you mean to say you have never seen her sketches?" he said. "I assure you Miss Bell used to make charming little sketches from nature, with a great deal of feeling in them too. Why I—why the first time I saw you—do you remember, Miss Bell?" and a remembrance of bygone days crossed Harold Pierrepont, and he rose from his seat, and, dragging his chair along with him, he seated himself close by her, saying then, "You

were in Stronnach Wood, do you remember? you had a white dress on, and a shepherd's tartan shawl, and you were working at an old stump of a tree with red fungi on it, and my sister Minnie and I had come out for a scramble; and you were so astonished to see her, for you had not met since your school-days. Do you remember all those old times?"

It was very certain that if he remembered, after all his travels and adventures, and through the long stretch of years that had elapsed, that she, remaining quietly in the old home with so few events to mark the march of time, would remember each circumstance of those old days; and as she listened to his words, a long-forgotten light was rekindled in her eyes and a bright flush was warming her cheek. From the hour of which he spoke, that summer day of long ago, in Stronnach Wood, she had loved this man with all the love she had to give; from the moment when his sister Minnie had introduced him to her, although he was some years her junior, and although she had never seen him before, she felt from that time that he was to be the love of her life. And all through the pleasant days that had ensued, in the bright summer time when they had all been so happy together, Harold Pierrepont had been greatly attracted to Bell McInnes.

She was some years older than he was, and even in those young days she had no pretensions to good looks; but there was a frank, honest friendliness and a genuine interest in all that concerned her friends, as well as her light, happy nature, which endeared her very much to those about her, and made them feel her friendship to be a thing of truth and stability. And in her Harold Pierrepont had found a warm sympathy with his art, and at every picnic Harold Pierrepont and Bell McInnes were to be found pointing out to each other and enjoying together the beauties of nature. After some three months of this enjoyment he found that he was restless until she had joined the party, and that nothing could be properly appreciated until her voice, gentle and timid as it always was, had chimed in agreement with his.

But the summer days passed, taking with them the pleasant time they had brought, Harold Pierrepont went away, leaving words which perhaps should have been spoken, unsaid. It may have been that there was a something missing or wanting in her, to call forth these especial words, it may have been that there was a failure on his part, or it may have been that the time came and passed by unheeded, for it is quite certain that the chance which brings two human beings together, or separates their paths through life, is many a time but as a feather floating in the summer air, which a something unseen, unfelt, and unknown, guides the way destiny leads. There came a day, the day they had all been together to see wee Mary on board the India-bound ship, when Bell McInnes and Harold Pierrepont had bidden one another "Good-bye." A good-bye which was to last over many a long year, had they but known it when the words were spoken.

Unexpected events had occurred shortly after, and Harold Pierrepont had drifted across the Atlantic, and afterwards across the Pacific, and in both the countries he had visited he remained some years, pursuing his career as an artist with great success, and never again until now had his feet rested on his native land.

In all the years of toil and anxiety, the remembrance of those summer days had naturally passed away like a mountain mist, which leaves behind it but a memory that it has been. But this night, as he sat once more in the "auld hous," with "auld acquaintance," although times were changed and things altered, auld lang syne came very forcibly upon Harold Pierrepont, and he devoted himself entirely to Miss Bell.

The two girls were effectually silenced. Miss Jean scarcely noticed it. Although so much seemed to have happened, it was but a short evening after all, and at ten o'clock Barbara entered bearing a tray with glasses and cakes, and the visitor *remembered* that after this he would be expected to go.

And Miss Bell was wonderfully animated, and insisted on mixing for him, with her own hands, a glass of some-

thing especially good which she remembered that he liked. And when he bade good night it was with the understanding that he was to come in the morning, whether it was for sketching arrangements, or for what it was, nobody exactly knew.

When the visitor departed Ruby and Dulcie demanded explanations to such an extent relative to the visitor, that it would have been equally difficult and impossible to satisfy them. That they were by no means contented at the little information their aunts favoured them with, was clearly discernible from the listless manner in which they lighted their candles. Miss Bell was entirely silent until, as she took up her lighted candle, she said, "Mercy me! and we never asked him how he got here; whether he went over to Lamlash and walked over the hill, or what he did!"

Miss Jean's only remark was, "And us all packed in the wee parlour, like herrings in a barrel!"

Ruby and Dulcie were the inhabitants of the room over the wee parlour, and this night a very great deal had to be talked over before sleep was possible; they gave it as their opinion that everybody's behaviour had been "queer."

"How strange it was," said Ruby, "first of all our meeting him up the burn, and then his coming here—did you notice Auntie Bell, what a colour she had? I never saw her look like that before. I say, Dulcie, do you think——"

"What?"

A silence.

"What do you mean?"

"Do you think that he and Auntie Bell were ever in love with one another?"

"Ruby!" This was all that Dulcie said, as she sat on the floor with her hands clasped round her knees; but there was a great deal of emphasis in her tone, and Ruby added quickly, and in a meek voice, "Well, I suppose he is too young for that."

"Young!—my dear, he is fifty, or a hundred."

"Oh! I am sure he is not more than forty."

A compromise was finally agreed on ; they decided that he was forty-five, and then they went to bed.

CHAPTER III.

SHADOWS OF THE PAST.

RUBY came in last to breakfast the next morning, saying she had been detained by Barbara, who had insisted on relating at full length to her a marvellous dream which she had had the previous night.

"No wonder," said Dulcie, who with healthy morning appetite was affectionately regarding her porridge.

"I had a very strange dream, too," began Miss Jean.

"Oh, and what do you think I dreamt?" inquired Ruby.

"When everybody's dream has been told I will tell mine," said Dulcie, "for I shall have finished my porridge by that time ; but I am quite certain mine was the most wonderful, for I kept on dreaming every dream that could be dreamt—I am not quite certain that we were not dreaming all yesterday evening, before we went to bed."

"Ah, that is just what I feel," said Miss Bell.

Dulcie opened her eyes very wide as she looked across at her aunt, and then silently she turned her attention to her porridge.

They were half through the description of Miss Jean's dream, when something darkened the light, and as they turned their faces to the window Dulcie remarked,

"The dream as seen by daylight, as large, or rather larger in life."

Unceremoniously, Harold Pierrepont pushed up the window, and resting his arm on the sill, he remarked, "Good morning ; only just breakfasting ! There was a glorious sunrise ; I've made a note of it."

"Come in ! come in !" said Miss Jean, and while he turned to the house door she added, "Great patience ! thou man is a perfect chimney for smoke."

"It is such a glorious morning," said he pleasantly, as

he entered the room, "suppose we all go out sketching?" The remains of the morning breeze, in the shape of a healthy tinge of colour, was on his brown face; he was a handsome, fine-looking man, but certainly he looked older without his hat, by reason of a scantiness of hair about his temples.

"We can't sketch," said the two girls, whilst Miss Jean cried, "I sketch!—great patience! d'ye want the whole place to think I am gone oot o' my judgment?"

"And I could not," said Miss Bell; "I have not sketched for years,—I do not think I should know how to use a pencil."

"Ah, but do come—for the sake of auld lang syne."

Harold Pierrepont had a way of pleading that but seldom lost its cause, and poor Miss Bell was the very last who could withstand those tones and eyes, and hesitatingly she began, "What will Jean say?—what will the lassies say?"

"Do go out sketching, Auntie," said both girls, and Miss Bell, like many another woman who hesitates, went.

"Bell McInnes," said Miss Jean severely, "are ye daft, woman? Do you mean to say that you are going out sketching in the woods, at your age?"

"I am sure I do not know. What had I better do, Jean? I really should like, as Mr. Pierrepont asks me, to try my hand at a pencil again."

"Try your hand at a fiddle-stick," retorted Miss Jean; "much good will ye get by it except an attack of lumbago."

Decision of character certainly was not Miss Bell's strong point, and she was speedily being reduced to a miserable state of uncertainty by these conflicting arguments, when Dulcie, who from long experience was fully aware of this, seized her aunt's arm, and hurried her at a good round pace from the room.

A few minutes afterwards, Ruby and Dulcie, in the room over the wee parlour, each with a foot on a chair, were lacing on their stout country walking-boots, as fast as their fingers could accomplish the performance, and, without looking round, Dulcie said in a low tone, "Ruby,

Auntie Bell is going to put on her blue bonnet," and then, fearing a relapse at the last moment on her aunt's part, she ran back to her, drawing the red cloak about her shoulders as she went.

In a very short time they gathered at the front door, Miss Bell carrying an old faded sketch-book, which was new to her nieces' eyes. She was evidently in some hurry to be off, and briskly she and Harold Pierrepont led the way, Ruby and Dulcie following, and just as they were turning out of the gate of Tigh-na-Beinne into the high road Dulcie whispered to her sister, "Auntie Bell is afraid that Auntie Jean will see the blue bonnet."

It was one of those glorious autumn mornings when the leaves are just turning, and all nature seems to be gathering warm colours for coming cold days; the sun was sparkling on the sea, and the air dancing in its own life-giving way over the mountains.

Soon they arrived at the wood where the tale of long ago had been enacted; and such a beautiful place it was, rising up the steep hill-side, carpeted with moss and ferns, and tangled with brambles, creepers, and bilberries, all charming, not only to an artist's eye, but to all those gifted with an inborn instinctive love of Nature and an appreciation of the beautiful, the best gift we have.

Not only men and women change, but, under Time's hand, the face of Nature alters; we visit old loved scenes, to find the path by which we went choked up by reeds and branches, and every vestige of it gone: new walls, new roads, and, perchance, the very trees under which we sat, and through which we loved to watch the sunset sky, cut down by the hand of "improvement," or even rooted up by storm and tempest. But other things, in imitation of the old ones, are ceaselessly springing up, which in time become the same, yet not the same. To Harold Pierrepont there was a strange unreal look of sameness about the wood, and yet he would have been quite unable to trace any path by which they used to go, any favourite spot where they had sat. It was not very long before an irresistible old tree stump presented itself, which might, to all appearance, have been the very one

described the night before, and Miss Bell and Harold Pierrepont agreed to sketch it.

Materials were unpacked, and comfortable seats arranged for the workers, Ruby and Dulcie assisting with very grave faces, and watching with the deepest interest all that took place, Dulcie's sole desire being, she said, to see the very first stroke or line with which Mr. Pierrepont was to begin his drawing—"the start off," as she called it—and silently she stood close behind him.

In no wise disconcerted by this, although he was watching her half-timid, half-mischievous movements with a smile on his face, after a long look at the tree stump he set boldly to work in a decided fashion, which clearly showed that he knew "all about everything," and made an immense impression on Dulcie.

It was a weird, fantastic old stump, with creepers hanging over it, and lights and shadows playing on it, and brilliant little red fungi beside it in the moss; and Miss Bell looked helplessly from it to her pencil, and then back again with a smile; but to commence anything that should bring about a result, seemed to be beyond her.

Ruby had brought her knitting-needles and stocking with her, and demurely she set to work, and time went on. Harold Pierrepont was becoming engrossed in his work, and Miss Bell was getting very nervous, but doing nothing. Seeing this, Dulcie said, "Ruby, you and I will go for a scramble, and try and find blaeberreries for Auntie Jean, she is so fond of them; if we stay here watching, Auntie Bell will never begin at all."

So they rose and left the sketchers in peace, and when they were some distance up the wood, Dulcie said, "My dear, I only wanted to leave that juvenile couple together, I know they were wishing us at the bottom of the sea," and then she tore off a small twig, and commenced nibbling it.

"What do you mean?" said Ruby. "You must not think that I was serious in what I said last night about their being in love with one another. I do not really think so."

"But I do, though. What is the meaning of the blue bonnet and that fearful old shepherd's plaid shawl, which

looks as if it had been left behind in the ark? Do you not remember what he said last night about a shepherd's plaid shawl?—this must be the very one that she wore the first time she saw him. I do not see the use of 'woman's wit' if one cannot understand such things—why, even a man could understand that, if you gave him time enough to think about it."

"I wonder if you are right? But he must be ages younger than she is."

"I am not so sure of that. You see women do look older than men of the same age; and then men do themselves up with whiskers and moustaches and beards, and so on; I do not see how one could tell their age, if it was not for their letting their beards grow till they take the hair from the tops of their heads. I daresay he is five or six years younger than she is."

And when they had argued a little more on the subject, they both agreed that they would never give their consent to the match, after which Dulcie started up, saying, "Come, it is no use looking for blaeberrys, you know they are out of season, and it is not proper to leave the juveniles so long unprotected; we must go back to them."

Time seemed to have stayed his flight, or the years to have rolled back to the days when she and Harold Pierrepont had sat and sketched, and Miss Bell was as one mystified, for Past and Present were fighting and tearing at one another with rude grasps, and the present time seemed to be but the realisation of a dream. Harold Pierrepont was beside her, changed and yet the same; his blue eyes were keen, searching, and blue as ever; perhaps it was only in her imagination that there was a look which she recalled gone from them; his hair was thick and wavy, but there were cold grey threads in it; his voice was fuller and richer than in those young days, and yet to her it seemed to miss a tone that there had been in it. If we could see into each other's mind and know all that our friend is thinking!

With Harold Pierrepont these old scenes but recalled faded memories, leaving them blurred and indistinct; he

remembered that he and Miss Bell had sat and sketched many a time together, and that she had always had a gentle sympathising way that was pleasant, and he even remembered that Minnie had taxed him with being in love with her, and that while he had refuted the idea as an idle thought, a consciousness had crossed him that such was the case on her side at least, while for himself he was uncertain. Doubts had crossed him many a time after that farewell on board the ship, as to whether his behaviour had been strictly honourable and right, but he had warded them off with assurances to himself of the impossibility on her side of being in love with a man so much her junior, and with a man's happy facility for casting aside thoughts unpleasant and undesired, he let the past bury itself. Now that he had returned he would pay her every attention and kindness in his power.

"What do you think of our lassies?" inquired Miss Bell, as they were left alone.

"I think they are most charming girls, and very pretty ones too, but they are not in the least like their mother."

"No, they are like no one but themselves, and they certainly are wonderfully alike; nothing delights them more than when new acquaintances mistake the one for the other."

"With all their resemblance, to mistake the one for the other is a thing I should never do; expression in them is so widely different. Miss Dulcie is always so full of fun; now Miss Ruby has a gentler, sweeter manner—more like something I took to the other side of the world with me, and brought back to Scotland—the memory of you."

A happiness was stealing over Miss Bell which set her inwardly rejoicing; and yet his manner had been merely kindly, and his words few; he had not said that it was the memory of her which had brought him back, only that he had brought the memory back with him.

So they sat and talked of old days till each became interested and forgot how time was going; and once Harold Pierrepont rose to look at Miss Bell's sketch. He sat down beside her, and resting one hand on the

ground behind them, he bent forward to point out to her some part of her drawing. Had they but known it, they thus made a somewhat sensational tableau ; and had they but looked round, they would have seen through the trees the glimmer of two red cloaks advancing.

It was Ruby and Dulcie, who were returning ; and after a moment's pause, Dulcie turned round and ran with a right good will in the opposite direction, and Ruby, who had a habit of following Dulcie's lead in everything, ran after her, bounding over tiny young burns, and springing through the bracken ; nor did they stop till they arrived at the rugged old sandstone wall which divided the wood from the road, when Dulcie said very breathlessly :

" I wouldn't have interrupted them for any consideration."

" What shall we do ?" inquired Ruby, also panting.

" Do ? Why go home of course. Not being in love, I am hungry and want my dinner. Get over the wall : make haste !"

These queer old Highland walls are very easy to climb, they are so low, and composed of great stones piled on each other, leaving between them easy resting-places for the feet.

Ruby was over and across the little stream of running water and in the high road in a moment ; then Dulcie, getting on to the top of the wall, cried, " Catch the fern !" She threw a great fern-root at Ruby, and then, with one bound, she cleared the burn, and stood beside Ruby in the road.

" Well done !" cried a voice in the distance.

Ruby and Dulcie, standing close together, looked round like startled deer ; and as they looked, a figure in the distance began to run towards them.

" It is Norman Ruthven !" they cried together, and in their turn they hastened towards him.

" Well, Norman, how are you ? When did you come ?" said Ruby, as he was heartily shaking hands.

" Norman, you dear old thing, I am so delighted to see you !" cried Dulcie, meeting and returning the look of

pleasure that was on every line of his face at the glad meeting.

"I came to-day. I am just on the road from the steamer. I am so delighted to see you! How jolly you look, you two! I never saw any one else look like you two. How is everybody? my father and your aunties?"

"Oh, everybody is just splendid."

"Well, I was so uncertain whether I could get over that I did not write for fear of disappointing my father; but I was so astonished at not seeing Auntie Bell on the quay. Is anything wrong?"

"Oh no," cried Ruby; "only——"

"She is otherwise employed," suggested Dulcie, adding, "Of course you belong to your father to-day, but tomorrow we shall expect you any time after dawn."

"I'll be there, Dulcie!—never fear, I'll be there!" said Norman Ruthven, with his honest, hearty voice and strong Scotch accent.

"And then we will have one of our glorious walks," said Dulcie.

"So we will, and long life to them!"

And then they said good-bye, Norman Ruthven hastening on to astonish and delight his old father, and the girls going in the opposite direction, and chatting so fast about him, that they forgot all about Auntie Bell and Harold Pierrepont, until they were unfastening the old green gate of Tigh-na-Beinne, when Dulcie paused and said with some dismay, "If we haven't forgotten all about the juveniles!"

Miss Jean was outside the door brushing a sofa cushion.

"Where are the rest?" she said.

"I think they are sketching, Auntie, but I could not say for certain."

"Sketching still! Great patience!"

Then they told of Norman Ruthven's arrival, and Miss Jean was greatly pleased, he was an especial favourite with her, as he was with a great many people, partly with her for his father's sake. Old Donald Ruthven was her second cousin, and one of the few remaining friends of her youth, who remembered Miss Jean as a high-spirited

girl, as yet untamed by time and circumstance ; they had always been warm cousinly friends, and certainly if any one had influence over her in the present day, it was Donald Ruthven.

All his life had necessarily not been spent on the island ; there had been a long stretch of years when he had but occasionally visited his native place, while he was money-getting in Glasgow. But his tastes and manner of life were simple ; and before old age had come upon him he had gathered sufficient to fulfil his greatest desire, to retire from the worries of business, and remain for the rest of his days on his native island, where he could, as he said, watch sea and sky and smell the heather.

Just before his retirement his wife had died, leaving with him one son, then a mere baby ; and when he had got over the shock, and become accustomed to his loss, Donald Ruthven became a happy man,—he had his son to interest him and to love, and he knew that while the sun looked down upon him, he need never more leave the waves and the heather, and his old age was to be passed amongst old friends and old associations.

Norman Ruthven, who, according to Miss Jean, had a “longer head for business than his father had ever had,” was in a merchant’s house in Glasgow, where he had for some years been working with a right good will and a steadiness of purpose, to carry out assertions made constantly in his boyhood, that he would be a “merchant prince,” and Miss Jean said that there was no doubt on the subject whatever.

Great things were expected of him, by every soul in the island, for there is a quaint conceit in these Highlanders, which makes them believe their kinsmen capable of anything to which they give their minds, and they will cite a list of any length of cities all over the world, where those most respected, those who sit in the highest places, those first in command, are Scotchmen.

Miss Jean made many inquiries of Ruby and Dulcie, as to “how the lad was looking ;” whether the close air and work of Glasgow had paled his cheek ; but they told of every appearance of vigorous health, and that he was

just the same old Norman as he had been when he was their playfellow.

Miss Jean desired them to return to the Stronnach Wood to carry some dinner for the other two, whilst she put on her bonnet, saying, "I'll just step over to Strathcraig, or Donald will be thinking it strange if I do not go over to see the lad."

Ruby and Dulcie, who fain would have accompanied her to Strathcraig, were inclined to grumble at having to carry dinner back to Stronnach Wood. "I think it is a very tedious business for us," said Dulcie; "the juveniles do not want us and we do not want them; and if it had not been for their reversing the order of things, and putting young heads on old shoulders, we should have gone to Strathcraig."

By the time she arrived at the wood she had recovered her temper, and as she climbed over the wall she remarked, "Well, I suppose people of that age can remember to be hungry even at such a time," and at the same time she dropped the package of dinner. "There now," she continued, "this nasty dinner has tumbled down and got all wet; I hope Auntie Bell has a good appetite and then she won't mind it."

Something had been said by Miss Bell once whilst they were at work, about the time; but Harold Pierrepont had come out without his watch, a proceeding which he said he resorted to when he wished to enjoy himself, and Miss Bell confessed that hers was at home locked up, because, twelve years ago, the glass of it had been broken, and ever since then she had been intending to get another glass.

Then Harold Pierrepont rose and resumed his seat beside Miss Bell, to see what progress she had made in her drawing, therefore to all appearance to Dulcie and Ruby, they were sitting precisely as they had left them.

An exclamation from Dulcie made Ruby look up. "They have never changed their positions all this while!" said Dulcie, with an amazed look on her face.

"My dears, what time is it?" said Miss Bell.

"Somewhere about tea-time," was Dulcie's mischievous reply.

"Mercy me!" said Miss Bell.

Whilst they turned their attention to the eatables which had been provided for them, they listened to the whole story of Norman Ruthven's arrival, and Miss Bell became impatient to get home, so it was settled that the two girls should conduct Harold Pierrepoint to see some favourite waterfall, and whilst they moved from the spot where they had sat, Dulcie whispered to her sister: "Auntie Bell ate all her dinner and never noticed that it had all got wet."

The walk turned out a great success, and it would be hard to say which of the three most enjoyed the scramble. They did not arrive at home again, until it was the gloaming, and the substantial Scotch "high tea" was on the table, and the lamps and fire were this night burning cheerfully in the big parlour, and welcoming with comfortable warmth and light the three, who were somewhat exhausted with walking, laughter, and merriment.

There is nothing so comforting when one is coming home weary, as to see these cosy lights peeping out at you from windows and doors; they suggest all the comforts of rest, fire, high tea, and above all—getting one's boots off. And Harold Pierrepoint experienced that evening a sensation which had not so fully come upon him for many a long year, the sensation was of—Home.

CHAPTER IV.

PHANTOMS OF THE PRESENT.

DULCIE had told Norman Ruthven that he would be expected the next morning any time after dawn; accordingly it wanted yet three hours of noon when his honest happy-looking face was seen coming up the drive, he imagining in his pleasant conceit that his presence would be welcome whenever he chose to put in an appearance.

Now breakfast was just over, and Miss Jean, with fresh morning energy, was going through a disagreeably long list of household duties which must be attended to without loss of time.

Auntie Bell was meekly acquiescent, Ruby and Dulcie wearily impatient, when he was seen approaching, and with one accord the two girls ran out to meet and welcome him.

Auntie Jean and Auntie Bell looked from the window out into the morning sunshine, where a happy, merry, noisy greeting was going on. There was a whole spring-tide of youth and joyousness in the scene that unconsciously went to the hearts of both watchers, and they watched them with a smile which broke into a laugh at a crazy little antic of Dulcie's. When the girls were wee things, they used always to say that Ruby was Auntie Bell's bairn, and Dulcie Auntie Jean's bairn; and although in these days they had ceased to say so, it was tacitly felt amongst them; even in character they each bore a certain resemblance to their own particular aunt.

"Norman wants us to go for a walk," said Ruby demurely, and trying to look as if she remembered nothing about the conversation on household matters; and Auntie Jean looked equally innocent of hearing Ruby's speech.

"I think, Jean, they might go," began Miss Bell, "I could be working at the mending for them, poor things."

"Auntie Jean, how can you be so wicked as to look stockings and dusters out of your eyes on such a fine morning?" said Dulcie.

"Stockings and dusters!" said Norman, in amaze.

"Auntie Jean wants us to mend stockings and hem dusters," began Dulcie.

"Oh, hang stockings and dusters!" he said, "away up-stairs both of you, and get your hats."

And without more ado the girls rushed upstairs, pushing each other unceremoniously out of the way in their hurry, and leaving Norman to make peace with Auntie Jean, as he well knew how to do. He had a fashion of

accomplishing most of his desires by attacking the difficulty in the simplest, most straightforward manner, which left other people wondering why they too had not done this, instead of racking their brains and travelling circuitous routes to arrive at the same destination.

Luncheon was packed in a creaky brown basket which they always had for these walks. Dulcie used always to say that every glen and hill in the bay was accustomed to its wheezy creak. It was generally late in the day when they returned from these expeditions; Norman was now so seldom at home, that when he was, nobody could refuse him anything he asked, and these old long established expeditions with Ruby and Dulcie were a thorough enjoyment to them all.

The way they took was over Dun Fion, which being translated, means "Fingal's Hill," for it appears that that wonderful gentleman spent the greater part of his life, and was finally buried, in Arran, as he was, we hear, in most parts of Scotland. Dun Fion is the high promontory between Brodick and Lamash bays; on the Brodick side it rises boldly from the sea, and from the top it is a formidable precipice to look down, and the view from it is as fine as any to be found in the length and breadth of bonnie Scotland. From a great height overhanging the sea, the two bays run away inland on either side; Brodick Bay with its grand long range of mountain peaks, and Lamash Bay with Holy Island lying in the mouth of it, and making it such a safe harbour for ships. There is something wonderfully calm and peaceful in this sheltered bay, the lovely landscape, the cottages on the shore, the cosy manse nestling amongst the trees, the ships waiting under the shelter of Holy Island for the fair wind that is to carry them to all parts of the world, it forms such a fair companion picture to the wild rugged grandeur of its sister bay.

"Norman, you are not out of breath, are you?" inquired Dulcie, as she followed him up the last climb to the top of Dun Fion. There had been somewhat of a race between them, just at the end, and much accusing one another of being out of breath. She then sat down as

close to the edge as was comfortable to her nerves, and the others following, sat down beside her ; " I do think," she continued, " that looking down a precipice is the most horrid thing I know," and forthwith she leant forward on her elbows and peered down into the clear sea below them. " There certainly is a fascination in a precipice ; they say if you rolled a stone down here it would go straight into the sea ; only do not try it, because I should be obliged to go after it."

Then on they went again, through Lamlash, talking and resting and walking, and the whole story of the meeting with Harold Pierrepont was related to Norman ; and by the time his visit in the evening, and the sketching on the following day, had been gone through, as well as Ruby's suggestions and Dulcie's remarks and Norman's questions, they were far on their way. Norman was so thoroughly one of them, and took such interest in all that happened to them, that it would have been a thing hitherto unheard of to lose any time in telling him of anything of such importance as this.

Arrived in the Fairies' Glen, they settled themselves in a cosy heather nest beside the burn ; and having finished the last contents of the luncheon basket, they sat and chatted, and sang songs, whilst the autumn afternoon sun was descending to the mountain tops.

" This is the sort of thing I enjoy," said Norman, " I think we might say that we had been perfectly happy this afternoon, might we not ?"

" Perfectly," said Ruby ; " I feel too lazily happy and comfortable ever to get up and go home."

" It is perfectly delicious," said Dulcie ; " and yet one cannot help thinking that there might be something better."

And in each girl's voice there was something missing from the full ring of happiness which there was in Norman's honest voice ; and yet they themselves could scarce have defined it. There was no care or sorrow of any kind to weigh on them ; it was merely the restless desire for an unknown, never attained something, which takes possession of us.

"I wonder what you two would do without one another?" said Norman.

"Oh! we could not possibly be separated," said Ruby.

"What do you intend to do, then, when you marry?"

"But we are not going to marry."

"Girls always say that."

"I do not see how we are to marry," said Dulcie. "You see it is such a ridiculous thing being twins; people always think it their duty to like us both equally."

"Ah! but it is a very big liking, and not one that springs from duty which leads to marriage," said Norman; "and when people come to know you, you are not so much alike; in fact, you are so immensely different that it is quite possible to be in love with one of you, and not a bit with the other."

There was a silence after this, and he wondered somewhat at it; but the fact was there had always been a slight jealousy between them relative to Norman. When they were children they would say, "Norman likes me better than he likes you;" but although they had left off saying this now, the desire of being "first" with those we care for does not leave us with childhood, although a good deal of ungarnished honesty does. For instance, in these days Norman's affection was never spoken of between them; but if they had mentioned it, they would have said, "Of course he likes you best." Naturally enough though, they thought and talked a good deal about their "Cousin Norman," friend and playfellow of all their lives, and they knew so few people.

"I wonder whether Mr. Pierrepont and Auntie Bell are out sketching?" said Dulcie, when home was almost in sight.

"Why, we might have asked him to come with us," said Ruby, as the idea occurred for the first time to her.

"Oh, he would not have cared to come with us," said Dulcie; "we cannot sketch, and we cannot remember what happened ages ago."

Nevertheless, she wondered whether Harold Pierrepont would have liked to have been with them.

CHAPTER V.

HAROLD PIERREPOINT REVOKES.

HOME and its comforts was in sight ; but before any one could remark on it, another object was visible in the deepening gloom ; it was a figure in brigand-shaped hat seated on the bridge, his outline telling black against the dark background : he was in a careless, lazy position, and smoking a pipe.

"There he is !" said both girls.

"Who is 'he'?" inquired Norman. "When you hear any one spoken of as 'he,' he has generally attained the position of being set above his fellows."

He was not answered ; for Dulcie had hurried on towards the bridge, and Ruby was occupied in watching her.

"Oh, Mr. Pierrepont!" she was saying, and eagerly shaking hands, "I haven't seen you to-day. I wish you had been with us ; we have had such a glorious day !"

He had put aside his pipe, and was as eagerly shaking hands. Perhaps he had found it dull on the bridge, perhaps he was tired of waiting for tea ; at all events, he was very glad to see her, and he said—"Why didn't you give me the chance of sharing the glorious day?"

Somehow Dulcie found this difficult to answer ; so she leaned her arms on the bridge and looked down into the burn below, and he as silently looked at the pretty rounded curve of her cheek ; then the others came up, and he was introduced to Norman Ruthven, and together they walked up to the house, Norman and Ruby leading the way, Dulcie and Harold Pierrepont continuing the conversation they had commenced before.

"Well, I thought probably you would be going sketching with Auntie Bell," said she.

"Nonsense, you didn't think anything of the kind ; you were both so excited and delighted at Mr. Ruthven's arrival that you forgot to give me one thought."

There was some particle of truth in this, and Dulcie

felt this and was somewhat taken aback, and only said, "Well, he is such an old friend."

"So am I," said he, "but in another sense."

After this there was a silence between them, which lasted all the way up to the house door; and just as they were entering she said hastily, "Well, will you go with us to-morrow?" and before an answer could be given she had rushed up-stairs and out of reach.

But while they were seated at their cosy tea-dinner a little later, Harold Pierrepont, who was seated opposite to Dulcie, asked his next neighbour to send round the message, "Yes," to Miss Dulcie.

Dulcie of course heard the message coming, and like every one else wondered what it could mean; but by the time it reached her, a light had evidently flashed across her mind, for there were ever so many extra roses in her cheeks, and she laughed heartily.

And of course everybody wanted to know all about it; and in spite of Harold Pierrepont's remark, "I really hope, Miss Dulcie, you will satisfy any natural curiosity your friends may have," Dulcie kept her own counsel, refusing to give any explanation. So the matter dropped.

"Dulcie, get out the cards," said Auntie Jean, when the tea-things had been carried away.

"Oh, no, Auntie; let us do something else; it is so wearisome to be always playing the same games over and over again."

Whenever the few families in Brodick met, cards were brought out, and long whist was played for love, as regularly as the tea-things were carried away. Ruby took no interest in the game, and Dulcie detested it.

"What shall we do then?" inquired Auntie Bell, staring blankly at Dulcie; for an evening gathering of friends without whist was a novel idea, at first difficult to entertain. But Dulcie had passed a happy day, entirely according to her own ideas of enjoyment, and desired that the close of the day should be equally according to her taste; and being somewhat of a spoilt child, in spite of Auntie Jean's strictures, and moreover in the habit of getting her own way, in spite of Auntie Jean's

blindness thereat, Dulcie made up her mind not to play at cards.

"We will be ever so cosy, auntie ; we'll sit round the fire ; we will have our work in our hands so as to look busy, only we will do nothing ; then somebody shall talk and tell stories ; and then, don't you know ? when one person talks, they are sure to say something which will remind somebody else of something like it which they know of, and then they tell *their* story. Now, sit down everybody, and we'll make Mr. Pierrepont tell us all about his travels."

Harold Pierrepont smiled, and pulled out one of the long ends of his moustache, and dropped into a chair, throwing one foot on to the knee of the other leg as he did so, and, still smiling and pulling his moustache, he watched Dulcie's movements.

"It is very lucky it is not really cold weather," said Dulcie gravely.

"Why?" said Ruby.

"Well, nobody else would be able to get near the fire because of Mr. Pierrepont's legs."

"Great patience!" said Auntie Jean. "Was there ever such an impertinent lassie ! What does it matter to you what Mr. Pierrepont does with his legs?"

"Not in the least, auntie ; I don't want to get near the fire. You had better ask the rest if they are cold."

Harold Pierrepont uncrossed his legs, then pushed his chair hastily back. But, unluckily, the cat was quietly enjoying her saucer of milk at a very short distance behind him ; the leg of the chair came dashing against the china saucer, which overturned, pouring a stream of milk over the cat, and the cat sprang into the middle of the room, and jerked the extreme tip of its tail about, and lifted and shook one wet foot after the other.

"Mercy me !" whispered Auntie Bell, softly starting, and looking first at the cat, then at the overturned saucer of milk, whilst Ruby rushed to the rescue with a duster which Auntie Jean always kept in a drawer, ready for any emergency.

The excitement having at length quieted down, and

Norman Ruthven having put the cat out of window, they gathered about the hearth-rug, Auntie Bell and Auntie Jean on either side of the fire, in the best black silk dresses, which were carefully turned up on the side facing the fire, for fear of scorching ; and beside each of them was sitting one of the girls, on a low stool. They wore dark grey dresses, but enlivened by bows of cherry-coloured ribbons, for they were as fond of a bit of bright colour as Auntie Jean and Auntie Bell were of sombre ones.

The two gentlemen pulled their chairs into the group, and Auntie Bell, busily knitting the while, remarked, "I suppose you found the scenery in New Zealand very beautiful?"

"And did you see any Maoris walking about with umbrellas and boots on?"

At this question Dulcie's back, which was resting against Auntie Jean, received a nudge from the supporting knees. But before an answer could be given, the door-bell was heard to ring, and there was a moment's startled inquiry on every face, until Norman Ruthven remarked, "I daresay it is my father."

And he was right, as he could scarcely fail to be, considering how small the Brodick world was.

Old Donald Ruthven's hearty voice was recognised in the hall, and Ruby and Dulcie flew to welcome him, for they were all alike fond of one another ; and in another minute or two he entered with an arm round each girl, and all talking and laughing together.

"Well, lads and lasses," said he, as he entered the room, "so ye are all gathered round the fire, and well ye may, for it's turned real cold the night."

They made way for him in the circle by the fire, and there was an honest welcome on every face, which bore its own testimony to the old man's character.

"Come ben to the fire and warm yourself, Donald," said Miss Jean ; "and, Dulcie, put out the cards."

As Dulcie passed Norman, she made a little grimace, saying, "Ah, there is no getting out of cards now, but they will be enough without us."

And Miss Jean and Miss Bell and Donald Ruthven gathered about the table and took up the cards. "Now, who will be the fourth? Mr. Pierrepont, will you? and we will leave the young ones to their own devices."

Harold Pierrepont felt the propriety of his joining the elders and their cards, and sat down with every profession of readiness, feeling at the same time an inward conviction that he would rather join the young ones and their—whatever they were going to do.

Then Donald Ruthven, who had a wonderful memory, sat down, saying pleasantly, "Now Jean, see if you and I don't beat Bell and Mr. Pierrepont all to nothing;" and he took his seat opposite to Miss Jean and commenced shuffling the cards. He knew all about that tale of long ago as well as Miss Jean did, perhaps better, although the subject had never crossed his lips to them.

And Harold Pierrepont sat opposite to Miss Bell. Upon her face was the look of eager affectionate interest which her face ever wore when she looked at him; and he met this look and felt half-worried and entirely low-spirited; and he turned and looked at the "young ones," who were standing together, talking in mysterious tones and laughing heartily, and not thinking of him, and his spirits rose and a smile crossed his face.

By-and-by, when they were fairly into the interest of the game at whist, the young ones opened the piano, and the three sang together; then came Ruby's voice alone, then Dulcie's alone. They were very pretty voices, but they were different; and Harold Pierrepont was just comparing them in his own mind, when he made a woful mistake—he revoked.

Miss Jean treated it merely as an unfortunate oversight, scarcely needful of remark, but Miss Bell offered many excuses for him. Then the singing came to an end, and he begged Dulcie for another song.

"You have no business to hear anything but Auntie Bell's excuses for your bad play," said she, looking over her shoulder at him and smiling. And, as an artist, he admired the outline of her cheek.

"I am pleasantly divided between that and your music," said he; "please, one more song."

She began to turn over her music, evidently she was going to sing something else. But nobody yet ever did two things at the same time well, and just at this point Harold Pierrepont played two extraordinary cards. The other three were completely taken aback by the first; but by some odd chance it won the trick. Then came the second, the king of trumps; Miss Jean played the seven; Miss Bell in despair threw down her only one, the queen; then Mr. Ruthven took the trick with the ace.

What else could have been expected? Miss Bell looked upon the playing both these last cards as a sort of flying in the face of Providence. Only Donald Ruthven did not say a word, but his keen merry grey eyes were wide open eyes, which all his life had been looking at everything around until they understood it; and seizing a moment when Miss Jean and Miss Bell were discussing the desirability of Barbara's bringing in the glasses, he said kindly, "We had no business to drag you into our game, you belong much more to the young ones."

He was saved from any difficulty of answering by Miss Jean asking him to ring the bell. And then he did his best to get very interested in the game, whilst Dulcie was singing, "My heart is sair for somebody," with a great deal of feeling and prettiness.


The evening came to an end, and everybody had enjoyed themselves; and whilst "good nights" were being said, a walk was arranged for the morrow, and Mr. Ruthven invited to spend the evening with them, for they could not deprive the old man of his son's company for one of the evenings of his short stay at home.

The walk was not to be until the afternoon; accordingly, the morning was dedicated most industriously to stockings and dusters, Ruby and Dulcie casting occasional anxious looks at the weather the while. It was one of those unsatisfactory mornings which give you no

sort of clue as to what they will turn out a few hours later. There was a mist over the mountain-tops, not that that was so very uncommon, but there was a general greyness and colourlessness pervading everything; and this was neither becoming to the landscape nor enlivening to the spirits.

The state of the weather was always a matter of indifference to Miss Jean; her interests and employments lay almost entirely within the four white walls of the house; and whether the sun shone or the rain came down she made little remark thereon, saving and excepting when the sun shone with an extra power, and she would order the cow to be brought into the byre for fear she got "fired in the back;" and again, in storm and rain, when it was too "coarse weather" for the cow to be out. Often and often Miss Jean, in her anxiety for the welfare of the "beasts," as the cow, chickens, ducks, and pigs were inclusively called, would pack herself up, the most extraordinary figure imaginable, and sally forth in the wind and the rain, help drive the cow into the byre, then with allurements of barley and odd scraps from the house, entice the half-drowned-looking chickens, which were standing on one leg under any temporary shelter they could find, into the dryness and comfort of the chicken-house. And it was really a dry comfortable place this chicken-house, with many and queerly contrived nests, for chickens love these odd sort of nests, that there may be some mystery about the laying of the eggs, otherwise they will make nests for themselves in the hedges and woods, or they will eat their eggs, with other vagabondish tricks of this sort. And Miss Jean, who was a right good manager, took as much care of "the beasts" as of her household.

Miss Jean's boots, too, were a marvel; they were so thick and stout, that in spite of seeing after the beasts, and driving the cow through wet sloppy grass, they never let the damp through, and the stockings were perfectly dry when they emerged from the big boots; but the greatest wonder of all was, that they never *wore out*. Miss Jean never wanted a new pair of boots, and those



she had were always good and sound. And whenever the girls wanted new boots, she had a pleasant knack of telling them how long she had had *her* boots in wear, and of the good condition they still were in!

It had been a source of worry and mortification to Miss Bell, all her life, that neither clothes nor boots could be made to last as Jean's did. As for the state of the weather, Miss Bell never noticed it save on steamer days; then she spoke of nothing else until the boat was safely in, which was always a great weight off her mind.

CHAPTER VI.

ART *versus* AUNTIE JEAN.

STOCKINGS and dusters were proceeding pretty well, when at the same moment every one in the room became aware that there were footsteps on the gravel outside. Four heads went up, and four pairs of ears listened, and, in another moment, Harold Pierrepont, with his brigand hat and the pipe in his mouth, appeared before the window, and, after the fashion which had already become his usual one, he raised the odd little old window, put his pipe in his pocket, and, resting his arms on the window-sill, announced, "The top of the morning to you all! I want you two"—nodding at Ruby and Dulcie—"to come out with me for a little while."

"Oh yes, we will come," said Dulcie springing up eagerly.

"I am going to give you your first lesson in drawing," he continued.

"Then I am not going," said Dulcie, sitting down again as quickly as she had risen.

"Oh, Dulcie, why not?" said Ruby.

"Thank you, I prefer to stay at home."

"Indeed you will do no such thing," said Auntie Jean. "If it had been anything else, I would not have let you go out till the afternoon; but it is so kind of Mr. Pierrepont to think of teaching you to draw."

"Come, Miss Dulcie, I have plenty of pencils, and chalks, and things, all ready."

"No, thank you, Mr. Pierrepont; I have such a settled conviction that pencils are useless tools in my fingers, that I should not even like to look at the result of my own strokes on the paper. Take Ruby, she is clever at everything, chalks included."

And Ruby went to get her hat, and whilst she was away, they all tried to persuade Dulcie to accompany them, and by the time Ruby reappeared in the red cloak, Harold Pierrepont had become aware that there was a certain amount of obstinacy and determination in Dulcie's character, for although she put off their persuasions with little nonsensical words and looks, when Ruby returned they were no further advanced than when she left.

She looked up at Ruby, saying, "Ready? Well, you *have* been quick; I am sure you have not laced every hole of your boots. Good bye! don't keep Mr. Pierrepont waiting, and for goodness' sake do something clever, after all I have said about you."

"Great patience!" said Miss Jean suddenly. "Man alive, you are on fire!" And she rushed out of the room after him to the door, and clutched hold of him.

Then Harold Pierrepont bethought him of what was a by no means uncommon occurrence with him—the lighted tobacco had fallen out of the pipe into the pocket where he had put it, and set the lining on fire. Before he had got his hand into it, Miss Jean had clutched the pocket in both hands, and the alarm and excitement came to an end with Harold Pierrepont standing in a helpless silly-looking attitude, and Miss Jean's vigorously determined hands on his pocket.

"I thought once or twice that I saw a wee bit smoke, and now I am sure of it," said Miss Bell in a determined voice.

"It's a pity you didn't arrive at that conclusion before," said Miss Jean, speaking sharply, and letting go the pocket at the same time.

Then they all joined in a laugh, and Miss Jean told Harold Pierrepont to give her the coat when they came

in, and she would repair the pocket, and then returned to the house ; and when Ruby could be persuaded to leave off laughing, the two started off on their expedition.

Now Harold Pierrepont had a strong notion that he must have looked both imbecile and idiotic in his part of the late drama, but "what could he have done," he argued, it was all so very sudden, and Miss Jean so tremendously "ready," and Miss Bell always did make things worse by saying silly things.

Dulcie was standing in the middle of the drive, looking after them, and just as they reached the gate, she called out—"Mr. Pierrepont, take care Ruby's red cloak does not set you on fire now ; I should put her on the side of the good pocket, the other may be still warm, and ready to catch fire again."

"Your sister reminds me very much of what her Aunt Jean was years ago," said he, as they were walking up the hill through the fir-trees.

"Auntie Jean like Dulcie !" and there was astonishment in the voice.

"Well, she was just as full of fun and mischief in her way, but there was a great deal more energy and determination. I always admired her brave high spirit, which made her sisters and friends alike depend so much on her. Of course, she never had anything like the prettiness of your sister, but still I remember her a fine, handsome-looking young woman."

"You remember her then ?" and Ruby looked up with a questioning astonishment into his face.

And as he looked back at her, he, for the first time, thought her as pretty as her sister. Leisurely they mounted the hill to the open moors, chatting pleasantly the while, he telling of his years of travel ; and gradually, as led on by her pretty, eager interest, of the difficulties which beset his early career, when he strove so hard to set his feet on the first steps of the ladder with the golden pinnacle ; then, as now, his first and last thought was art—art was the purpose and dedication of his life.

Almost unconsciously they had paused, and seated themselves on the low rustic bridge which crossed a little

waterfall. They sat sideways on the bridge, facing one another, but with their eyes fixed on the merry plashing little fall. Between them and the nearest fall stretched the weird arm of an old birch-tree, with some trails of the tiny pointed Scotch ivy hanging from it. Whilst he was talking, both their eyes had rested on this old tree and its ivy, as it hung over the water. Backwards and forwards their eyes had travelled until they knew by heart each twist, each knotted curve, and green leaf.

He suddenly ceased talking, and pointed to the old tree. "Look at that bit of nature, that is the beginning and end of art. By-the-by, I forgot the drawing lesson. Now we will draw that."

And he got out and arranged block and pencil for Ruby, and pointing out the tree-stump, said, "Draw that."

Ruby looked and felt more helpless than she had ever done in her life.

"I don't know how to draw, Mr. Pierrepont; what am I to do?"

"Look at it till you understand its form and lines, and then put that on the paper. Try, it is so easy when you once begin."

Whilst he was speaking, he was taking a sketch-book from the pocket corresponding to the burned one, and twisting himself round so that his legs hung over on the other side of the bridge, and pulling his brigand hat well down over his brow, so as to shade the sun, which had just peeped out, from his eyes, he made a little sound which startled Ruby, and said, "Just look at the light and shadow on the silver stem." Then, with quick looks between his object and his book, he began to work with his pencil. And Ruby wished she knew how to do likewise.

Feeling desperately uncomfortable and silly, and with a great desire to run home, she stared at the old silver birch, and feeling that anything in the world would be easier to draw than this, she commenced some trembling feeble lines, furtively glancing at Harold Pierrepont, for fear he should be watching her pencil.

But he had no such idea. Silently he worked on, thinking of nothing but his own drawing, and the bit of nature before him. He worked on for some time after Ruby had brought her performance to a close, vaguely impressed that it was not very bad, although not exactly like the silver birch; but what more to do with it she had not the faintest notion.

"Ah," said he suddenly, "the sun gone!" and as suddenly remembering the existence of Ruby and her drawing, he bent towards her and looked at the little performance, she blushing furiously the while.

"By Jove, that's good!" said he; "wonderful for a first attempt. You'll be an artist yet—look here though;" and then, with various touches with his own pencil and accompanying remarks, the difficulties were explained.

To say Ruby was gratified and pleased, would be to give a very faint notion of her delight, and she was proud that her drawing had not turned out a failure, as she had never before been proud of anything, and her flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes told this very plainly.

Harold Pierrepont pulled his moustache and smiled, saying, "So, you are pleased; so am I. I like enthusiasm and people who can be enthusiastic; if you make up your mind to it you will draw capitally—love it, and stick to it, and see what art will be to you, and what you will do with it."

And Ruby resolved with all her strength to be an artist, and to devote all her energies to study art.

"Let me see what you have done, Mr. Pierrepont?"

Her pleasant conceit in her own performance received a deathblow when she looked at his beautiful and delicately faithful pencilling.

"Oh, it is no use my trying!" was what she said.

"What nonsense!" said he; "this is sketched by a hand trained by three or four and twenty years' study and hard work; that is a first attempt, and a first-rate one, I can tell you."

"I should like to draw it over again; may I?" said she eagerly.

"To be sure, the best thing you can do."

And she was just going to begin once more, when she suddenly stopped, saying, "Oh, what is the time? Auntie Jean will not like me to be late for dinner."

"Time was meant for slaves, not artists," said he; "artists are privileged to keep their own time—five minutes to two."

Ruby started. Though she fully intended to be an artist, and like other artists—art *versus* Auntie Jean—yet in the meantime Auntie Jean was the stronger power.

"I must go now, Mr. Pierrepont, but I shall come back and draw again directly after dinner."

"Very well, I will walk with you as far as your gate," said he, "and leave my things here and then come back to them."

"No, indeed, Mr. Pierrepont; if you are not going home to dinner, I can go quite well alone; it is only just a wee bit down the hill, and I shall run all the way."

And she gathered up her precious sketch, and ran off down the hill amongst the sweet-scented fir trees, which scattered their needles all along the road, making it pink and springy to the feet.

Ruby bounded down-hill, filled with a new and delicious sense of self importance, with vague desires and ambitions of which she had known nothing on her way up the hill. She was completely in dreamland, and only woke up to the realities of life to see Auntie Jean take her sketch, and looking at it, to hear her say:

"Great patience, lassie! did you do this? did Mr. Pierrepont take you up the hill all the way, just to draw a pitchfork with straw hanging on it?"

"It isn't a pitchfork," said Ruby, most indignantly. "It is a bit of old birch tree which hangs over the burn, the third burn up the road."

"I know it quite well," said Dulcie, "it hangs just like this; you have done it beautifully, Ruby!"

Comforted by this praise, Ruby was enabled to eat a good dinner, and soon afterwards she found an opportunity to tell Dulcie all about Harold Pierrepont's praise, and of her own desire to draw, paint big pictures, be an

artist ; in fact there was no limit to her newly awakened ambitions, led on as she was by Dulcie's enthusiastic sympathy.

By-and-by, Norman Ruthven came for the promised walk, and on the way up the hill he was much astonished to hear that Ruby was going to stop at the third bridge, for she was making a sketch there.

The girls were evidently very important and serious over the matter, and Norman Ruthven soon saw that they did not wish to be chaffed upon the subject.

Arrived at the third bridge, they found Harold Pierrepont at work with colour-box and brushes, making a most charming sketch of the little waterfall with the old arm of the silver birch stretching before it.

Ruby was enchanted, and speedily resumed her old position on the bridge and announced her intention of making her sketch over again, that she understood better now how to do it.

So it was arranged that Dulcie and Norman should walk as far as the top of the hill, and then descend into the Fairies' Glen, where they were to meet Ruby and Mr. Pierrepont, in two hours' time.

The two walked on. Norman Ruthven was silent; this eager sketching was a new freak of Ruby's, and he was not quite sure whether he liked it.

"Since when has Ruby taken to sketching?" inquired he presently.

"Since this morning," said Dulcie. "I always thought she had a talent," she added ; "she does everything well that she puts her hand to, and she has always been wishing somebody would give her drawing lessons."

"So Mr. Pierrepont is going to teach her?"

"I suppose so ; he offered to teach us both, but I knew I had no talent for it, so I did not care to make a fool of myself. Ruby brought home a capital little sketch this morning. Mr. Pierrepont praised it a good deal; indeed he has filled her with a desire to be an artist ; she intends to give her whole time and thought to it."

"How long does Mr. Pierrepont remain here?"

"I really cannot tell you, Norman."

They walked briskly up the hill ; there was no sun, and, for the first time that year, Dulcie felt the sort of damp chill through the air that tells of late autumn, and winter to come. "How silent and quiet the moor is !" and by-and-by another thought struck her, "How quiet Norman is !"

And Dulcie, mischievous, high-spirited little body though she was, had a sympathetic sort of nature which always fell into the mood of those she happened to be with. She walked soberly along beside him, attributing their silence to the weather, loss of Ruby's society, or something too vague to be defined. Norman would have told you that he was equally uncertain what made this walk less enjoyable than other like walks, but in the inmost recesses of his heart he perfectly well knew that he was laying up for himself foundations of a stronghold that was to contain a monster—a green-eyed monster, which is apt to grow grim and terrible when he takes up his abode with us.

CHAPTER VII.

FORESHADOWINGS.

THEY met in the Fairies' Glen. They all remembered this walk for many a long day. One thing they remembered of it was that it was the last time they saw it that year with leaves on the trees ; winter came on apace after this day ; the last of summer had been the day before, when the two girls and Norman had been up Dun Fion.

As soon as Dulcie saw Ruby and Harold Pierrepont her spirits rose, and rushing up to them and catching hold of Ruby with so sudden a grasp that it threatened to upset them both, she demanded a sight of the last, latest sketch.

"Here it is," said Harold Pierrepont, "I have it in my book, for I am very proud of it. There, is not that an improvement on this morning's work ? She has given herself to me, for I am to teach her entirely, and after

my own fashion, and you will all see, some day, what an artist she will be."

Dulcie thought it beautiful, wonderful, and fully agreed that Ruby would be an artist some day.

"May I see it, or is it only for private inspection?" said Norman.

Harold Pierrepont handed him the little sketch.

Strange to say, Norman Ruthven did not like this. Why should Mr. Pierrepont show off the sketch? So he took it, in no very amiable frame of mind, and held it upside down and looked at it.

"Well, Norman," said Dulcie, "I did not know before that you were an artist."

"What do you mean?" said he.

"Well, I have heard that artists are very fond of looking at a picture upside down, but I never heard of anybody else doing so."

"I beg your pardon," said he, "I thought it was queer somehow."

"Don't mention it," said Ruby, laughingly; but she did not like it for all that: it was an insult to her sketch, and she thought, "What can poor old Norman know about sketches, though? he has never lived with artists, or been taught to study nature; he is a dear old Norman, but he can't paint as Mr. Pierrepont can." And she looked from him to Harold Pierrepont with admiration and respect.

He had been much amused at Dulcie's remark, and thought Norman Ruthven richly deserved it. The sketch in question was certainly nothing very wonderful; still it was clever and bold for a beginner; and holding it up the proper way, it was very plainly an old tree with ivy hanging on it. He knew nothing of Norman Ruthven above and beyond that he was a good-tempered sort of boy, but a boy who spent his days on a high stool in somebody else's office, and those sort of fellows didn't know anything about the good things of the world, or how to live and enjoy. Above all, they had a pleasant way of looking down on artists, who knew these things.

Norman Ruthven saw these different looks exchanged,

and it did not tend to help him back to better humour ; and for the first time in all their long acquaintance, Norman was decidedly snappish and sulky.

The two girls did not notice it so much as they would otherwise have done, for Harold Pierrepont was so full of fun, and so amusing, that they were fully occupied with laughing and playing nonsensical little tricks.

"Mr. Pierrepont," said Ruby by-and-by, "couldn't you make a lovely sketch of this place? isn't it sketchable?"

"Sketchable ! I should think so. There is a complete picture whichever way you look, without altering a thing ; there is something in its wild, uncultivated beauty which, even while it draws you on to grasp it, resists your brush by its very simplicity."

On one side there was a broken wall of heather which shut out the solemn-looking mountains, and nestled under its protection grew a copse of birch trees, their silver stems knotted and twisting, fanciful as a fairy's handiwork ; under them grew graceful ferns and short green grass, and beside them babbled the restless little burn, cutting its free rocky passage to the sea, catching on its way bits of light from the sky, and reflections from the overhanging ferns and birch. On the other side of them opened a grand desolate glen, now looking eerie and weird in the gloaming.

"Your last walk but one, Norman !" said Dulcie gaily, "to-morrow is your last day. Wait one moment everybody ; I must pick one wee wee fern 'in memoriam ;' it has been such a pleasant time, and to-day Ruby has had her first drawing lesson, and been so clever." And she bent under the straggling bracken boughs, and disappeared from their sight, springing through the taller ferns on her way to the burn, where grew the wee wee ferns.

Before the sound of the rustling of her dress among the ferns had died away, a sudden and piercing scream came back to those who were waiting for her, and with one accord they all dashed through the tangled birch and ferns after her.

Harold Pierrepont led the way, and the first thing he saw was Dulcie, with her back pressed to one of the trees, and clinging to its branches with both hands. There was horror and astonishment in very line of her face, as she gazed down into the tall ferns. He followed the direction of her eyes, and not until he was close beside her did he perceive that there was a dark figure stretched at full length in the bracken at her feet.

In that same moment a feeling of dislike and repulsion for this object passed over him which he could not account for at the time, but which he often thought of afterwards as a foreshadowing of woe and trouble, as the first chill touch of the creeping mist.

Dulcie took hold of his arm with both her hands, and whispered, "The man, the man—oh, I thought he was dead!" and she gave one or two queer little gasps.

The other two crowded round, and the stranger moved, and sat up and looked at them with as much astonishment as they looked at him. Dulcie was the first to speak, having had more time than the rest to recover from her astonishment. "I beg your pardon, I really did not see you; you were so covered by the ferns. I am afraid I stepped on you."

"Indeed, it is I who must apologise," said the stranger in an unmistakably English accent, and rising to his feet. "I am afraid I startled you most unpardonably, but I had fallen asleep—with fatigue."

They were all staring at him in the most open-eyed manner. This stranger's appearance was remarkable; he was very slight and very tall, taller than Harold Pierrepont. The face was excessively handsome, but perfectly colourless, evidently bearing marks of recent illness, pitiful to see in so young a man; but as he stood up before them, they perceived that he was wet through, and the water was still dropping from his coatsleeves.

"Do you know that you are wet through?" said Dulcie, touching his sleeve with her hand.

"Oh, yes, I remember; it must have been a very short time ago. I fell down that bank into a pool in the burn. I had lost my way, and could not imagine where

I was, and did not see the sudden edge of the bank. When I scrambled out, I sat down to rest, and fell asleep; but I must have been asleep only a few minutes when you found me."

"Rather a dangerous proceeding to go to sleep in wet clothes," remarked Harold Pierrepont, speaking for the first time. "Are you staying at Lamlash?"

"No, at Shiskin."

"At Shiskin!" was the general cry.

"Am I far from there?" inquired he.

"About fifteen miles," said Norman Ruthven.

"How can I get there?"

"You can't get there to-night," said Dulcie very decisively. "Come with us to our house, and get your things dried first, and Auntie Jean will tell you the best thing to do."

The stranger hesitated. "You are very kind, but I cannot intrude upon your hospitality, particularly in this trim."

"If you were in any better trim, you would not be invited," said Dulcie, with something of Auntie Jean's manner, as Ruby for the first time thought.

And then the stranger smiled, and admitted that it would be the greatest boon to get something dry and warm about him; and, with a great many thanks, he placed himself at their disposal, and together they found their way out of the tangled birchwood and ferns once more into the pathway, only there was an addition to the party that had gone into the copse.

Ruby and Dulcie led the way along the moorland path, the three gentlemen following. "My dear Dulcie," Ruby took an early opportunity of whispering, "what will Auntie Jean say?"

"I should have thought you knew well enough by this time that she will say, 'Great patience!'"

"Do be serious, Dulcie. Do you think she will be angry?"

"Angry, Ruby! Do you think Auntie Jane or Auntie Bell would wish us to send a poor stranger fifteen miles over the hills with soaking wet clothes on him? Surely

no Scotchwoman, or any other woman, would do that Ruby!"

They had been unconsciously quickening their steps, when, looking back, Dulcie perceived that although the gentlemen were walking together, the stranger was lagging slightly behind, and she waited till they came up, and said, "We are forgetting what a distance you have walked: please do not hurry, there is plenty of time."

He thanked her, and quickened his pace, denying any feeling of fatigue; but she kept her place beside him, and resolutely walked slower. And gradually they fell into conversation as they descended the moor, and Dulcie thought this tall, slight Englishman had a wonderfully pleasant voice and a beautiful face, and he thought this Scotch lassie the bonniest, brightest girl who had yet crossed his life. This was what they thought of one another before they arrived at Tigh-na-Beinne. No wonder their walk was pleasant, in spite of wet clothes and the grey sky.

The three who were preceding them looked happy enough; probably Ruby was the most contented of the three. Harold Pierrepont received all her attention and conversation, for she could think and speak of nothing but art, and of subjects for pictures.

Norman Ruthven had not yet got over his sulky fit, he was angry with the girls and angry with Harold Pierrepont; not that they had done or said anything tangibly to offend him, that would have been a far more satisfactory state of things to him. But if the real facts were to be known, this was the state of things—he had been in love with these two girls all his life, and all his life he had made up his mind that in the first possible moment, when circumstances should permit it, Ruby was to be his wife. Circumstances had kept his tongue tied up to the present moment, but this had not much troubled him, for in his pleasant conceit he imagined himself "monarch of all he surveyed," and with a "right there was none to dispute;" when all at once a great big adversary appeared on the field, a fellow with a huge beard and a brigand hat, a pencil in one hand, a drawing-

book in the other, just the sort of man girls were apt to be idiotic about. And from the two girls, he must needs select Ruby, to teach drawing to ! To show how much can be done in a very short time, here was Ruby, who had had but one day's tuition in art, with eyes, ears, and thoughts for no one but this painter fellow, whom she had only known a couple of days, and here was himself, the friend and companion of all her life, walking beside her only—nowhere !

It was too bad. During the earlier part of their walk he had turned over in his mind the desirability of making a confidant of Dulcie—of making a thorough clean breast of everything in spite of unpropitious circumstances. But that little idea was shut up, for here was Dulcie, fickle as the rest of her sex, only a few yards behind them, entirely taken up with another utter stranger. "Jolly state of things !" he grumbled to himself, thrusting his hands into his pockets and vowing that he would not care a bit for any of them.

The stranger just finished relating something to Dulcie as they came up to the door, his voice was low, and the others did not catch what was said, and no one but Harold Pierrepont saw a look which then passed between them. He did not know exactly what it meant, and he had had but little experience in love-making ; but this one quiet glance passed almost unconsciously between them, and Harold Pierrepont felt instinctively that he did not like this look. And as he went into the house he wondered that he could have for one moment thought Ruby as pretty as her sister.

They found Auntie Bell in gorgeous array, waiting in the big parlour, where the fire was burning gloriously, and everything in the most perfect order. Tea was being prepared in the wee parlour, and Auntie Jean, with the black silk dress turned up and a big apron on, was in the kitchen making scones for tea.

They conducted the stranger into the big parlour, and leaving Ruby to make the best of things in general, Dulcie rushed off to find Auntie Jean, and to tell her all about their adventure.

Auntie Jean's hospitality quite agreed with Dulcie's, that it would never have done to send the poor man off alone in soaking wet clothes. She decided that he must get into bed and have his clothes dried. Accordingly she sent Dulcie up-stairs with a match to light the fire in the spare room. Then bringing her operations to a close, and discarding the apron, she found her way into the big parlour, to welcome the tired stranger with true Scottish hospitality.

In the meantime, Dulcie, with her hat thrown on the floor beside her, was sitting in a heap on the hearth-rug, in her red cloak, eagerly watching the "kindling" of the fire. The fire itself did not show any cause for half the anxiety which was being bestowed upon it.

Barbara, under Miss Jean's directions, knew right well how to lay a fire, and with the single match which Dulcie had applied, it was sputtering, cracking, and burning up right cheerfully. When it was advanced enough to have its first poke, she rose from the ground and looked round the room to see if everything appeared to be comfortable. Of course everything was in its place, and nothing wanting. Then Dulcie thought it would look so much more cosy if the old arm-chair against the wall were pulled close up by her newly kindled fire ; so, not without some fear that Auntie Jean should come in in the middle of the proceeding, the comfortable, roomy old chair was lugged across the room. Quite satisfied with the effect, she rushed down-stairs to announce that the room was ready.

On entering she found them all assembled, even old Donald Ruthven, who had since arrived. He volunteered to conduct the stranger upstairs, and together they left the room. And then the girls ran off to put on their grey dresses with the cherry-coloured ribbons.

Of course there was a great deal to be said during the time, and if one of them was excited at the turn events had taken that day, the other was more so, and it would have been hard to say which of them chattered the most, or which of them had the most to tell ; and when they were both ready, and they must clearly descend to the

big parlour, neither of them had said one half that there was to say.

At the foot of the stairs they met Auntie Jean and Harold Pierrepoint. She was just giving into his hands a steaming goblet of toddy. "There, just take him that. Harold, and tell him to drink it at once, and that the rest of his tea is coming in a few minutes." And then Harold Pierrepoint and the toddy disappeared up the stairs.

They had all just got into the wee parlour to tea when Harold Pierrepoint reappeared, and, strange to tell, the toddy with him. "Miss Jean," he said, "he is either a fool or mad, but he wont have your good toddy."

"Wont have it, man! what do you mean?"

"He is a teetotaller, or something, and says he will be so much obliged if you will send him up a cup of tea."

"Tuts, havers! don't be talking to me about teetotallers. When a man has been drowned soaking wet in the burn, and then gone to sleep in his wet clothes, it is not a time to be talking trash about teetotalling—tell him I insist on his taking it at once."

Obediently Harold Pierrepoint remounted the stairs, but again he descended with the toddy. "I can do nothing with him, Miss Jean; he wont have it."

"Hets, man! just hand me the toddy," said Donald Ruthven, who had become convinced that there was some misunderstanding about the business, and he mounted the stairs with the fast-cooling toddy, to try his luck with the obstinate stranger who wanted so much persuasion.

In the meantime Harold Pierrepoint stood patiently holding a tray with a white cloth, which Miss Jean and Dulcie were loading with good things—for Scotch people are clever at hot, substantial "high teas,"—and when the tray would hold no more, and all was ready, including the cup of hot tea, he was sent up with it.

This time he came down empty handed, and announced that the stranger had taken most kindly to his food, but that Mr. Ruthven was still standing by the bedside with

the toddy in his hand, staring from it to the stranger. "But I think he'll have to take to drinking it himself," he concluded.

"Did you find out the stranger's name?" inquired Auntie Jean.

"Yes ; he was just telling Mr. Ruthven his name is Maurice Ingram."

CHAPTER VIII.

"D-U-L-C-I-E."

It was a merry evening, and Auntie Jean was the life of the company. She never showed to more advantage than when dispensing hospitality ; even Norman Ruthven forgot to indulge his fit of sulks, and enjoyed himself as much as any one. Towards the close of the evening, somebody remarked, "What are you going to do with the stranger, Miss Jean?"

On which she answered with dignity, "Mr. Ingram's clothes were drying finely by the kitchen fire, and as soon as they are quite dry I suppose he will put them on—perhaps, Harold Pierrepont, he could get a bed in the house where you lodge?"

"I don't think so, Miss Jean ; of course I cannot say for certain, but the house is particularly small, and the family it belongs to particularly large ; indeed, it is a matter of the greatest interest and curiosity to me, where and how they pack away for the night."

"Send him over to me," said Donald Ruthven ; "we will take him in ; and to-morrow is the Sabbath, he cannot be trudging about the hills. We will be right pleased to have him till Monday."

"Thank you, Donald, that will be the best arrangement," said Miss Jean, well pleased.

But an obstacle presented itself to interfere with this well-laid scheme. When Donald Ruthven went upstairs to speak to the stranger, he found him soundly sleeping ; and bringing this news down to Miss Jean, he said, "Jean, thon poor young fellow is sound asleep ; my

going into the room did not waken him; he looks too tired out. I'm afraid the poor lad is far from strong. What will we do? Shall I go and waken him?"

"Certainly not," said Miss Jean, decidedly; "he will do well enough where he is. Perhaps we will send him over to you in the morning."

Hereupon Barbara, who was standing in the background of the passage, said softly, "Eh, Miss Ruby, I'm glad to hear that, for he's a real nice-like lad."

"Oh, Ruby, I am so glad he is going to stop at our house!" said Dulcie, in high glee, when they two were in their own room. "I don't believe Auntie Jean will send him away to-morrow, as it is Sunday. We do not often have any one staying in our house, do we? What a time this has been!—so much never happened before in all our lives. Do you not think Mr. Ingram is the handsomest man I ever saw—I mean that you ever saw? Let me have another look at your drawings."

And Dulcie chattered away so fast about everything that had happened that day—not the smallest thing had escaped her—going headlong from one subject to another in a fashion which would have rendered it totally impossible for any one but Ruby to have understood her. Then Ruby's drawings were brought out, and each line discussed and admired. And Dulcie suddenly announced, "I say, Ruby, I shall copy this best one; I want to see if I can draw too—only do not tell Mr. Pierrepont or anybody."

At this moment Auntie Jean's step was heard. She always lingered some time after every one else, downstairs, doing one thing and another, particularly on Saturday nights, so that there might be little to do on Sunday morning. She could always see the light under the girls' bedroom door, if it were still burning; and she had a habit of requesting that it might be put out there and then.

"There is Auntie Jean," said Ruby, starting, and throwing her drawings over the other side of the dressing-table on to the ground. The words were scarcely out of her mouth when the handle of the door turned somewhat abruptly, and Auntie Jean's head appeared.

"Girls, why is your candle burning? you ought to be in bed long ago." And the head disappeared and the door shut, and the girls scuttled about the room like a couple of rabbits, in hasty obedience to Auntie Jean.

And gradually an utter stillness fell over the little house on the hill-side—even the fir trees in the wood were perfectly silent. Miss Jean was just stepping into bed, when she heard a door open gently down the passage, and in another moment her door was open, and, peering out, she said, "Anything the matter, Mr. Ingram?" for at his door she could plainly see by the firelight behind him, a head and shoulders muffled up in a blanket.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, I was wanting my clothes, I ought to be going."

"Your clothes, man! What do you mean by disturbing a quiet household and wanting your clothes in the middle of the night?"—it was eleven o'clock, but Miss Jean was accustomed to early hours;—"go to bed, and don't let me hear any more of you till breakfast is ready in the morning." And then she shut her door, saying, "Was there ever such a man! Great patience!" as a new idea struck her, "surely to goodness he doesn't walk in his sleep!" and she opened wide her door, and notwithstanding a very large nightcap and frills, she stood in a dignified position on the threshold.

But she was relieved from this anxiety, for the door was closed, and all was still down at the far end of the passage; and with a sigh of relief she again closed her door, saying the while, "Heaven be thankit for this and all other mercies!"

This little exchange of words, and the opening of the doors, had been heard by each person sleeping on that floor. The two girls were sitting up in bed and listening and shaking with laughter, particularly after Ruby had remarked, "My dear, I know Auntie Jean has got her biggest night-cap with the frills on."

And then Dulcie insisted on getting up and opening their door, "just one tiny crack, to see what Auntie Jean looked like."

In the room next to Miss Jean's, Miss Bell woke up

with the sound of the opening doors and her sister's voice, and she lay still and listened ; only when it had all come to an end she remarked to herself, "What a mercy that there was our Jean to speak to him ! if I had heard him open his door, what in the name of wonder would I have done or said ? What a woman Jean is !"

The stranger, on shutting his door, stumbled along in his blanket towards the fire, which was still burning friskily. There was an old arm-chair drawn up to the fender, and there was some little dark object under this old chair.

He picked this up, and sat down in the chair to examine it by the firelight.

It was a very small black velvet hat with a pheasant's wing jauntily stuck on one side of it.

"That belongs to one of those pretty girls. I wonder if it is the one who walked home with me. Why, of course it is ! She told me she had lighted the fire for me. I wonder what her name is !" And holding the small hat in his hand he wondered to himself whose house he was in—who the old ladies were—whether one of them was her mother—and whether she lived in that house always—and who those three men were—whether they were relations of hers. And he thought again, "What sweet eyes she has !" Then turning the hat round he saw on the black silk lining of the crown some letters stitched largely in red worsted ; he bent nearer to the fire, and read—"D-u-l-c-i-e."

By-and-by he, like the rest of the household, was fast asleep.

And in due time the Sunday morning dawned—a Sunday that was to be a day of import to at least one or two of our friends.

The grey uncertainty of the previous day had cleared away, and every one awoke with the consciousness of a splendid morning. Sundays are nearly always fine in Scotland, at least so say English tourists, who, far from feeling grateful for the fine weather, say, "If it had been any day but Sunday !" On Sunday in Scotland there is nothing to be done—no fishing, shooting, or boating or

bathing, even mountain climbing is met with hostility and hard words, means for locomotion there are none; wherever you may happen to find yourself on Sunday morning, there you will be on Monday morning, unless you walk away on your own two legs.

Norman Ruthven awoke early. "There is a good omen in the weather," was the first thought that crossed him, for he felt the influence of the sunshine even before his blind was up. He dressed himself and went out into the fresh, keen morning air before the rest of the household was stirring. He sauntered along the road, looking over the old wall where he had seen Ruby and Dulcie spring out of the wood a day or two ago; then everything had been as in old times, the two girls had been as unfeignedly delighted to see him as he them, and now like a sudden April rain-cloud passing before the sun, everything was wrong. "I'll speak to her to-day: why shouldn't I speak to her to-day?" he said over and over again to himself. He did not add, "or that painter fellow will have it all his own way after Monday morning, and will make her forget me in a week."

Donald Ruthven, according to old habit, strolled leisurely up to the church some time before the commencement of the service, and he and his old friends, who gradually gathered, sat on the rocks outside the church, chatting sociably until the bell rang; this was the signal for entering, for the bell only rang for three minutes. How would it do for London church bells to adopt this fashion?

Norman, not far from his father, was talking to his old friends, but his eyes restlessly travelling past the entrance-gates down the road, amongst the fir trees. Time went on, and Norman was making up his mind that they were not going to appear at all that day, when the old quavery bell struck up its first note, and at the same instant he recognised Miss Jean's face behind other people.

Miss Bell and Miss Jean were walking along, talking to some friends as they came, and at a little distance before them Norman's eyes rested on what they had so long sought. Ruby and Dulcie, with the stranger who had

come among them on the previous night, were pacing demurely up the road to the church, the scarlet cloaks replaced by gorgeously-fitting black velveteens, which Norman thought even more becoming.

Nor was he alone in his opinion, for some one else had that morning thought Dulcie prettier each time that he saw her.

Nods and smiles were exchanged ; there was no time for more, and they passed into the church. Their seats were far apart, but well within sight of one another, and Norman comforted himself with the thought that at least that artist fellow wasn't there.

The artist fellow was not there, nor did they see anything of him that day ; but on Monday he told Miss Jean he had not liked to disturb them on Sunday. But the rigorous strictness which Harold Pierrepont remembered long years ago was by no means carried out now. Slight changes had imperceptibly crept in, unnoticed as they came, only Miss Jean would sometimes remark, " Bell, this was never done on the Sabbath day when you and I were young." And Miss Bell would answer, " You are right, Jean. What would our father have said could he have seen us now ?" Their father had been an exceedingly strict, stern man, and Miss Bell had stood in greater awe of him than even of Miss Jean. But Miss Jean never volunteered an opinion as to what their father might have said. She had some sort of notion that times were changed, and the less said about it the better.

In those old days Miss Jean and Miss Bell had never dreamt of going outside the door on Sundays but to go to church ; now, their two nieces always went for a walk on that day. When they were little, it had been found impossible to keep them quiet in the house all the afternoons, and they had been sent out, and the habit had never dropped. But it was understood that Miss Jean did not approve of anything in the shape of a scrambling walk ; there was to be no burn climbing, no ferning, and not much talking and laughing. Although Miss Jean allowed them to keep up their practice of a Sunday walk, neither she nor Miss Bell ever dreamt of going out them-

selves. And Ruby and Dulcie had grown up with the notion that although they two were allowed to take a quiet walk on Sundays, it would be a breach of all propriety and decorum for Miss Jean and Miss Bell to do likewise.

We all grow up with some odd notions, which, one way or another, have become fixed and established in our minds, and although they gradually fade away, they take a longer time to efface than any impressions which we afterwards receive.

Shortly after the two o'clock dinner Norman Ruthven arrived, to accompany the girls for his last walk before he left for Glasgow on the following morning. It was a glorious afternoon, and the sun was glowing among the last remaining autumn tints. The girls were ready, and waiting for him outside the house; the stranger, as he still was to Norman Ruthven, with them, and evidently on very friendly sociable terms. And the little party set off—a little party that had walked the hills together for many a long day, but now a stranger had joined the trio.

They were to walk along the road to the Corrie Shore, said Dulcie, and to the Corrie Shore they went, leaving the road when they had come to the end of the castle woods, and following a path among the birches which led up to the open moor.

They walked four abreast the whole distance, and talked of scarcely anything but sketching and pictures; for, to Norman's disgust, Mr. Ingram turned out to be an amateur artist, and excessively fond of art in all shapes. Was there no end to these painter fellows? thought he. It was rather hard lines on a fellow to come home for a little recreation and enjoyment, and be swallowed up in art on every side in this manner. And then, by way of a last feather to break the camel's back, here were they all walking four abreast, with every prospect of continuing and finishing the walk in the same fashion. How or when he was to say what he had on his mind, was a question which he could not solve.

But the more difficulties arose around him, the more

determined he became to find a way through them. On one point he quickly came to a decision ; he disliked this Mr. Ingram quite as much as Mr. Pierrepont—certainly he had not that easy, happy manner, which carried everything before it ; but he was interesting-looking and young, and this fully made up for it. Having once decided to dislike him, he disliked him very much, and he disliked everything he did or said. He thought it very silly of Ruby to set up such a sudden enthusiasm on everything connected with art, and once or twice he was savage with the unfeelingness of Dulcie's playful remarks to him.

It was he who suggested leaving the road for the hill-path, for the path was narrow and the way rough ; certainly it was out of the question for four to walk abreast. Ruby thought it would be better to keep to the road ; Dulcie gave her opinion that, as it was Norman's last day, they should go wherever he liked best, and Norman altered his opinion of her immediately, and up the hill they went, Norman altogether in no very enviable frame of mind.

When they emerged from the birch trees they were on the top of the cliff, and in the distance was Holy Island, beyond, Dun Fion, and home in the far distance—and at their feet before them the blue sea, looking, in its utter calmness, like fields of ice. There was scarcely any path, but the girls, to Norman's desperation, seemed determined to cluster together, and not to separate so much as one yard. When it was time to turn back, he seized an opportunity to say to Dulcie, " Do walk on a bit with Mr. Ingram, I want to say something to Ruby."

" May we not hear?" she inquired.

" Well, if you don't mind, I would rather tell her when she is alone."

" Very well ; you can walk slower, only you must let her tell me afterwards. Is it anything very particular?"

" Oh no, nothing very particular," said he, quickly, and only anxious that Ruby should not overhear the conversation. But his hopes were put to flight by Dulcie's next remark.

"Ruby, you are to stay behind, and walk slowly, because Norman wants to tell you a secret, which we are not to hear."

This gave Norman an impression that he had comfortably got himself out of the frying-pan into the fire; anyhow, we must allow that his position was a somewhat difficult one, when he found that Dulcie and Mr. Ingram had fulfilled his desire and walked on, and Ruby was walking along beside him, silently awaiting the revelation of the secret.

He felt his position was the more difficult by reason of the long-standing old friendship between them. Had she been but an acquaintance of some few weeks, words might have come more naturally; but here was a girl with whom he had been on such intimate terms of friendship for so many years, that to change the character of the friendship struck him as well nigh unnatural. A comparative stranger might have expected the words, and, so to say, helped him along, but one look at Ruby's face assured him she had not the very faintest notion what he was going to say.

Under the circumstances, a headlong course was, he felt, the only one he could possibly take, and without waiting till the others were more than a few yards away, and without one more look at her face, he plunged into the secret.

Probably he told his tale in a silly, disjointed fashion, for he lost his head, and to this day cannot remember how he "began;" but by-and-by he found that he was saying, "Is it because I am so poor, Ruby?"

And there was no answer. So things were going badly for him, and he added:

"But, Ruby, if you cared one wee bit for me, just one wee bit, as you used to in auld lang syne, you wouldn't mind poverty. 'A man's a man for a' that,' as we three sang the other night. You would wait, you——"

"Ah, Norman! don't say that. You know I should not give one thought to poverty—it would not stand in my way, only I cannot think of marriage in connexion with you and me, Norman; when we have been friends

all our lives, we do not suddenly turn round and fall in love with one another."

"There can, at least, be nothing 'sudden' in it, Ruby. We have fully trusted and loved one another for years, even in the days when we were children together, and you used to tell me that you loved me 'more than anybody, even Dulcie.'"

"That is the very reason, Norman, because I would have told you at any moment that I loved you. It shows how different it is to the love one reads of and imagines; this cannot be marrying love."

"I think," was the answer, "that it is just the kind of love for which one should marry—a trusting, confiding love which has been growing for years, on which you can rely as on your own soul, and which you are as sure of as the sun shining in the heaven above you."

Again there was no answer.

"Ruby, have you nothing to say to me?"

"Oh, Norman! it hurts me not to do what you wish, and I can't tell you I do not love you, for I do, I do love you dearly, dearly! You have always been my greatest friend, but I cannot marry you, Norman, dear."

"I will wait, Ruby, for I am sure you will overcome this crotchet. I could not do anything but wait for you; once loving you with the complete and entire love I do, nothing ever can make me change. I must always wait, and I must always hope for you, Ruby."

And then Ruby caught her foot in the heather, and stretched out her hand, which he caught just in time to prevent her from falling, and they stepped through the heather hand in hand. The sun was just sinking below the solemn-looking mountains, and the bracken, heather, and birch were all aglow and glorious in its light, on that Highland moor.

The girl's whole mind was in a whirl. If Norman had spoken as he had spoken to-day but a little while ago, she would probably have taken him without a doubt of her own love; but in a few short days all the mischief had been wrought. Glimpses of another manner of life

had come to her, new thoughts, fresh ambitions had awakened. The consciousness of a hitherto sleeping talent, which might in time carry her with triumph to a golden future. Lastly, there was the man who had given her these new thoughts and bright ambitions, and thereby thrown a halo about himself which would last for many a day.

Norman not only understood nothing of art, but he did not pretend to interest himself in what was now of more interest than anything to Ruby, and this was greatly damaging to his cause.

"Isn't nature grand and sympathetic?" she said at length. But this time she received no answer, and Norman Ruthven stood a silent, thoughtful man, and yet he felt all and more than the girl beside him. She thought of nature alone, without connecting the same qualities in the man beside her, who loved her with the whole poetry and power of an honest man's heart and soul. He looked at the glowing sun disappearing behind the purple mountains, at the richly-coloured moor side, at the crystal-foaming little waterfalls, at the ferns, wild flowers, and rugged, broken, sandy banks, and felt and understood to the utmost degree all their beauty; only to him "she" was in it all, from the greatest even to the least.

"Let us watch the sun go, Norman."

Together they stood hand in hand there, watching. The last bit disappeared, and the golden carpet was withdrawn from their feet, and the moorland looked grey, and the purple hills cold. Across the peaks of the highest mountains there yet remained a line of rosy warmth, but below it a cold, chilly mist began immediately to rise from the valley, and steal up the hill-side, and then it was the gloaming hour.

When sun and warmth had gone, Ruby turned, and she and Norman looked into each other's eyes with the full sympathy and friendliness that had been theirs for such long years, and she said ever so softly, "I am so glad you didn't speak, Norman. No one but you could have understood that scene so thoroughly with

me." For the moment she had evidently forgotten everything else. "Now let us go home ;" and she sprang merrily along the old peat road.

And Norman followed with his head high, and gladness in every footstep, for he was thinking within himself, if she feels thus for me, she will yet come to know the worth and meaning of her love—I can wait.

But as he stepped along beside her, he knew well that this mischief had been done him by "that artist fellow," as he had called him, who had sat on the bridge and taught Ruby to draw the old birch tree hanging before the burn. But strange to say, in spite of all that had happened, he was more charitably disposed towards him than he had been, before he spoke to Ruby.

When the others were in sight, he said, "My last day, Ruby ; to-morrow I shall have dreary, gloomy Glasgow to look at instead of the mountains."

"Well, Norman, Glasgow is very nice in its way. These beautiful, ever-changing mountains are apt to make one idle. We have had a very pleasant, happy time, and in the winter we must work and do something to show the good nature has done us in the beautiful summer days."

"You are right, Ruby, quite right ; only what can I have to do with the 'good' ? The time that I spend revelling in the beauties of nature, wakes up things sleeping in me, fires new desires, and fills me with an energy which, for very want of scope, falls dead ; and the reason is that I am a poor man, that I must spend my youth and strength and every thought in struggling as best I may, fighting for my place in the world ; and when life goes hard with a man, he has not much time for thinking of nature and the good."

"Norman, is there no good in doing what your hand hath found to do, with all your might ? Even nature, with all its beauty, cannot teach you more than that, nor anything truer than that. Norman," she suddenly added, "where are Dulcie and Mr. Ingram ?"

They were not in sight.

"Perhaps they went the longer way round," he suggested.

had come to her, new thoughts awakened. The consciousness of her talent, which might in time be of golden future. Lastly, they had given her these new thoughts thereby thrown a halo about her for many a day.

Norman not only understood but did not pretend to interest himself more than anything to do with the cause.

"Isn't nature grand and beautiful? But this time she was so long. Norman Ruthven stood a moment, yet he felt all and more than the thought of nature alone, with the qualities in the man beside him. The whole poetry and power of the soul. He looked at the landscape behind the purple mountain moor side, at the crystal-fern, ferns, wild flowers, and rugged rocks felt and understood to the uttermost only to him "she" was in it to the least.

"Let us watch the sun go down."

Together they stood half an hour. The last bit disappeared, the sun withdrawn from their feet, the grey, and the purple hills of the highest mountains there were no warmth, but below it a cold immediately to rise from the valley and then it was the gloam.

When sun and warmth were gone she and Norman looked at each other with full sympathy and friendliness for such long years, and so glad you didn't speak could have understood :

"The good little person was very pleased to do anything for the comfort of the tired stranger," said she, with some embarrassment and a little laugh. "But come," she added, "we are going out, and I am not going to be good any more, and you are not a stranger any more."

From the first moment Dulcie had felt that the stranger was her particular property. She it was who had discovered him wet through and sleeping by the burn, and she who had brought him home and lighted the fire to make him cosy, and now he acknowledged her services and his appreciation of them.

During that Sunday afternoon's walk, contrary to usual rule, Ruby did nearly all the talking. She and Maurice Ingram talked of art and of Harold Pierrepont. Ruby said she was so sure they would be great friends. How little she knew of the verdict against him which had gone out in Harold Pierrepont's mind! Dulcie listened and spoke now and then; for the first time in her life, her overflowing high spirits had deserted her. She only knew that it was utterly impossible to talk to Maurice Ingram in the nonsensical fashion she would talk to Norman Ruthven or Harold Pierrepont.

Maurice Ingram had been somewhat astonished at Norman Ruthven's request, and at Dulcie's manner of naming it. Had Norman made his request to him privately, he would have had but little difficulty in guessing the state of affairs; but he thought there could certainly be nothing between those two, or the sister would not have spoken in that manner. However, he was perfectly willing to walk on with Dulcie, and leave the others as far behind as they chose. Before church-time that morning, he had already learned the whole history of the McInnes family, and of the Duncan branch; the facts had all been furnished by Dulcie, and he now in return was telling her of his own family.

"Then you have four sisters and no brother?" said she.

"Yes, four sisters; three of them married, and the fourth deformed. I am sorry to say I am the only son."

"I should have thought you would have been very glad to be the only son; they must all make so much of you. When there is only one brother among so many sisters, he always gets spoilt."

"Ah! that is the very reason. I would give anything and everything I possess if my parents could have another son—a good, steady fellow, who would make up for my shortcomings."

"Have you then so many shortcomings?" said she.

"So many," said he, very seriously, "that for my parents' sake I have wished that I had never been born."

Dulcie was somewhat surprised at the seriousness of his face and voice, when, seeing the look on her face, he added lightly, "That is by no means my chronic state; everybody feels 'low' occasionally; thank heaven, I have plenty of elasticity left in me. I intend to do great things yet."

"That's right," said Dulcie, "I do so enjoy hearing people planning of all the great things they are going to do in the future. Castle-building is the most delightful thing I know. My sister has just begun to draw, and it turns out that she has a real talent for it, as I always suspected; and now she is full of all sorts of ambitious designs, and we plan all her successes for the future, until I get green with envy that I cannot set up a future of my own to romance about."

"I should have thought you might romance to any extent about your future; you must remember that success in painting is not the only romance in the world."

And then they walked on silently for some little distance, till Dulcie recalled to mind their previous conversation, and asked another question about his family.

"My father is very shaky and ill, and they have taken him to a German bath, to try if that will set him on his legs again."

"Who are 'they'?" inquired Dulcie.

"Mother and Una and Alice. Una is my little deformed sister; she is only fourteen or fifteen, the youngest of the family."

"I suppose Alice is one of your married sisters?"

"No. Alice is—Alice is a friend."

"It must be very nice for Una to have her friend with her."

"Alice and Una are not very great friends somehow."

"How very odd," thought Dulcie, "for Alice to be with them if Una does not like her!" It seemed a strange idea to her, and she instantly decided to dislike Alice.

"By-the-bye," he added, "my mother is a Scotch-woman, born and brought up in Glasgow; her father was a shipbuilder, of the name of Archer. But her people are nearly all dead, I believe; at any rate we never hear anything of them now. They were mortally offended at her marriage with my father, who is a Roman Catholic; and when they heard that she had, after her marriage, become a convert, they all shut their doors in her face."

"Then you are all Roman Catholics?"

"All of us."

To say that Dulcie received a shock would be no exaggeration; the teaching of this remote island home of hers had been that Roman Catholics were to be treated with suspicion, that priests were fiends, and the Pope the devil incarnate.

A heavy weight seemed to have fallen on her and taken the gladness from her face and the springiness from her steps.

"Is Alice a Catholic too?" was the first question which she asked after a short silence; and as she asked it, she wondered at herself and why she had thought of it.

"No," said he; "but she intends to become a Roman Catholic."

Again a suspicion and dislike of Alice crossed her mind, and again there was a silence. Maurice Ingram became fully aware that something had gone wrong; he saw clearly that she had received a shock at the intelligence that he was a Catholic; and it irritated him to find that she should be under the sway of prejudice. He was angry with himself too, and he thought, "Why could I not have spoken of Alice in a more matter-of-fact way?"

I must have said something absurd, or she would not ask so many questions about her ; hang it all !”

As Dulcie was silent, he continued : “ My father has a little estate in Norfolk, and there they have brought me up to be the good-for-nothing idle fellow I am now. They sent me here to sketch and try and amuse myself while they are in Germany ; for I have had a long, trying illness, and they want me to pick up my strength.”

“ So, by way of improving your health, you lie down in wet clothes in moss and ferns, and go to sleep !” said Dulcie, recovering herself somewhat.

“ And how grateful I am that I did so ! See the results. It was one of those strange chances which often-times change the whole course of people’s lives.”

Things were getting into a smoother, pleasanter channel now ; and gradually Dulcie came to forget the jar that had come between them, and only felt the first fascination of the evening before creeping over her. It was new and strange to her ; and walking along the sandy road in the gloaming, beside him, she yielded to it easily and willingly.

When they came to the turning to the short cut home, she paused and looked round. Ruby and Norman were certainly in sight, and coming towards them, but so slowly and leisurely, that they evidently had no desire to overtake them.

“ This is the shortest way home,” said Dulcie. “ I wonder which way they would like to go ?”

“ Evidently *not* the shortest way, judging from appearances.”

So they led the way further along the sandy road, until they entered the plantation of fir trees, and came to a bridge over a broad burn—the bridge whereon Harold Pierpoint had sat a couple of evenings ago, awaiting their return from Dun Fion.

Fir trees, bridge, and burn looked dusky, for in late autumn amid the hills the gloaming is short. Dulcie sat on the bridge, saying, “ I think we must wait for them before we go up to the house ; Norman is only just

coming in to say good-by, for he goes away by the boat in the morning, and it leaves very early."

"Poor fellow!" said he.

"Oh, dear!" cried Dulcie; "the tree caught my hat, and has pulled it over my face." And she took off her hat and tucked up with one hand a wavy bit of hair, which the tree had pulled from its wonderful erection of chignon.

"You did not wear a chignon yesterday," said Mauriæ Ingram.

"No, we very seldom do on week-days; we generally have our hair hanging down; but on Sundays we do everything differently: we make the grandest chignons we can of our hair, and we wear bonnets to go to church, and we do not wear our red cloaks; so that we never quite know ourselves on Sundays."

By this time the hair was brought back to its original chignon by Dulcie's fingers, which were dimpled and pretty, and which, against the rosy cheeks and the dark brown hair, looked very white and soft; and then she took up the hat, the same little black velvet hat she had worn yesterday evening, when, just about to put it on her head, she came to a full stop, with the elastic in her two hands, and staring with a puzzled look into the lining of the crown.

Perhaps the gloaming was deceptive, a little closer, a little nearer to her eyes—something had evidently happened to her hat; and in abrupt sentences she began: "My name is gone! 'Dulcie' was written inside in large letters. Who cut it out?"

The name was gone, that was clear; and in spite of the gloaming dusky light, it was easy to perceive that it had been cut out in a somewhat jagged fashion, probably with a penknife. After another few moments' astonishment, she came close up to him, and held the hat towards him. "Look, Mr. Ingram, somebody has cut out the name from my hat; our hats are so exactly alike that we each have our names written inside them. Who can have done it?"

She was very close to him; and bending forward, still

sitting on the bridge, he whispered in her ear: "I did it."

"You!" and she turned her face round to him quickly, and was just going to add "Why?" when her eyes travelled up to his eyes and the question remained unspoken; and, like the reflection from a magic lantern, the astonishment gradually died out of her face, and changed and altered until it reflected with a warm glow all that stood readable in his face. And, in spite of the gloaming and the dusky fir trees, any one could have read that this was sudden passionate love, the love that tarries not for time or circumstance, but which comes a whirlwind without any warning, scattering prudence, forethought, reason, and common sense who knows whither.

"I did it," he said again; and he got hold of both her hands, when a call was heard coming through the trees. Ruby and Norman were close on them, walking along in real earnest now to overtake them. Dulcie picked up her hat and put it on, and with one shy look out of her pretty dark eyes at Maurice Ingram, she ran back to meet her sister.

The moment she had left him and he was alone sitting on the bridge, a woman's name escaped his lips, and starting violently, he cried, "What have I done! what am I doing!"

Ruby, Dulcie, and Norman came up to him on the bridge, chatting and laughing as they walked; Dulcie joking them about the length of time they had taken to tell the secret, and they accusing her of wilfully mis-leading them by coming a road they so seldom took.

"It is all Mr. Ingram's fault," said Dulcie; "he said you looked as if you wanted to go the longest way home." As she spoke he joined the group, and together they went up the hill to the house, Maurice Ingram walking slightly behind the rest; and to their laughter and chatter he to himself put in a silent refrain, which, like the clicking of a clock in his ears, went "Treason! treason! treason!"

Miss Jean and Miss Bell were of course sitting in the big parlour, in the black silk dresses, for it was Sunday;

even the tea-things were laid in the big parlour on that day.

The room looked so cosy and cheerful after the darksome road and the somewhat chilly air ! There was a comfortable, substantial air about the old ladies themselves and their arm-chairs ; the fire was a triumph, and flooded the whole room in its glow ; there was a white cloth on the table, and the tea-things on it, laid long ago, before Barbara went to the Gaelic service at afternoon church ; there was the kettle on the hob, muttering to itself as if impatient to get on the fire again and boil as fiercely as it could. Altogether, it was a room to make you feel comfortable to look at ; and the whole party felt its influence as they entered.

Dulcie was the first ; she made her way up to the hearth-rug and Miss Jean, and dropped down on her knees, and with her elbows on her aunt's knees proceeded to tell her where they had been for a walk. Ruby stood beside Miss Bell ; it would never for one moment have entered the girls' heads, or the aunts' heads either, that the order of things should be reversed. It was the force of long years of habit, and probably would continue as long as they lived. Dulcie was Auntie Jean's bairn, and Ruby Auntie Bell's bairn.

Ruby stood in the shadow, and it was somewhat difficult to see her face ; but Dulcie was in the full light of the fire, and her brown hair caught red and gold lights. Norman Ruthven stood by Miss Jean, speaking of his departure in the morning.

"Well, lad, we cannot be keeping you at home, however willing we may be," spoke Miss Jean ; "but write to us when you have time to spare, and one or the other of us will always be pleased to answer you ; and don't spare the letters to your father, you little know how he looks for them on boat days."

"I'll write often enough, Auntie Jean ; it is always a pleasure to write to the place your heart is in."

"And you will be sure to get home for Christmas ?" put in Miss Bell.

"No fears about that." said he, emphatically.

Whilst this friendly chatter was going on, Maurice Ingram stood somewhat in the background, keenly feeling that there were two sides to his heart; the one strongly tempted, as he looked down at Dulcie with the ruddy lights in her hair; that side of his heart beating quickly and warm; the other side growing cold and chill, repeating with each beat "Treason!" and with each throb growing colder and more chill.

"Good-by, Norman; good-by!" And they all gathered at the door to see the last of him; they standing in the light, and he disappearing into the dark.

"Good-by; God bless you all!" came from some way off in the dark; and then they turned back into the house, and the kettle was set on the fire, to boil as madly as it chose; and the girls came down to tea—Ruby quiet and thoughtful, but over Dulcie's face there was a glow of something never there before, and which made her more beautiful than Ruby, and "sweeter, bonnier far" than she had ever been before.

Miss Jean, Miss Bell, and Ruby all noticed that there was something different about her, and that she was looking very pretty. Maurice Ingram noticed it, and the consequence was that the warm side of his heart spread and increased until there was but one small chill spot remaining. It was so small that there was only room for one word to stand written thereon, but this one word was "Treason."

CHAPTER X.

"FOR I'LL COME BACK AND SEE THEE."

"You have refused Norman? oh, Ruby!" And then Dulcie added, "Did Norman really ask you to marry him? oh, Ruby!"

Both ideas were so utterly unexpected and new to her that she yet found it impossible to believe that Norman should be thinking of anything so serious; and then it

occurred to her for the first time with anything like a clear perception, that both they and their old playfellow were "grown up," and to all intents and purposes like other men and women.

That Norman should have asked Ruby to marry him ! Then he must have been thinking of this for some time, that was very clear. How little she had imagined it ! But what was stranger and more incomprehensible than all, was the fact that Ruby had refused him. Refused Norman ! dear old Norman ! their oldest, greatest, dearest friend ! Ruby must be what Auntie Jean called "out of her judgment," and this she plainly told her.

"Of course, Dulcie dear, I am very, very fond of dear old Norman ; I love him ever so much ; but I am not in love with him, if you understand what I mean."

"No, I don't understand ; besides, if he wants to marry you, he must have been very hurt at your refusing him. Don't be talking any more nonsense to me. Ruby, you must have Norman ; I'll just write him a letter, and tell him you were taken by surprise, or something of the kind."

"No, you will not write ; I am not going to marry him, I tell you. Would you like to marry him ?"

"No, I wouldn't have him, and he didn't ask me ; besides, I——," and suddenly she came to a full stop.

Ruby waited and looked at her, but the longer she waited the redder grew Dulcie's cheeks ; and a light broke upon Ruby, who added, "And you perhaps care a little bit for somebody else, whose name is not Norman ?"

And finding there was no help for it, Dulcie said, "Nothing of the kind ; but if you ever speak of it again until I speak to you about it, I will eat you."

"It is Mr. Pierrepont," thought Ruby to herself ; and, for the first time in her life, a purely selfish idea followed : "He will not care for her ; she has no sympathy with his art." She stood by the dressing-table playing with a pin, turning things over and over in her mind the while. Dulcie was carefully putting away her black velvet hat.

And so ended an eventful Sunday.

The first thing that happened on Monday morning was, that Norman Ruthven left by the early morning boat, changed from the light-hearted boy who had arrived a few days previously to a thoughtful man. On his face was set a quiet observant look ; in his mind was fixed a steadfast determination to "succeed." He would stick to work, in his diligence and attention to it he would not swerve ; and, more than all this, he would win Ruby. "I'll have her yet, all in good time," he decided ; "in the meantime, work."

There was much for him to do before he could offer her a home ; so much, that he almost wondered at himself for the way he had spoken yesterday to her. "Never mind," he thought, "it did no harm ; it has put the idea, which was evidently new to her, in her mind ; and during the time that I am working in Glasgow, she will grow as accustomed to the idea as she will to my faithfulness to her, and how much more I love her than any one else can love her."

At one of the stations between Ardrossan and Glasgow, a drunken man got into the carriage, and before they arrived at the next station, had succeeded in making his state evident to two ladies and another gentleman in the same carriage. When they arrived at the next station, Norman Ruthven politely asked him to get into another carriage, but he refused to leave his place. The ladies entreated Norman to get rid of him, or find them other seats.

"Never fear," said Norman, "I'll manage him," and he called a porter and privately requested him to convey the intruder from the carriage. But the porter merely laughed, and said it wasn't his business.

"Better call for the station-master," suggested the other gentleman passenger.

"Where is the station-master?" inquired Norman Ruthven.

"In his room, sir ; he is very busy, you can't see him just now—better get in—train just starting." And, in truth, there were signs of the train again starting. Quick as thought, Norman Ruthven remounted to the carriage, the step up to it being tolerably high, and getting his

hands well into the intruder's collar, and shuffling his legs away from him, lifted him out at the open door, and let him drop on to the platform, where he sat and gazed in a helpless manner at the retreating train.

"Come by the next train!" he good-naturedly called out of window; and then, before his fellow-passengers had barely finished their thanks, he had ensconced himself, with a newspaper, in his corner.

"Capital fellow that!—no nonsense about him!" thought the other gentleman on the middle seat opposite, while the two ladies at the other window admired both him and his behaviour, and made up their minds to have a good talk about all that had happened when they were alone.

Arrived at the Glasgow terminus, he made his way through the crowd, with his small bag in hand. The doorway through which every one was passing was so crowded that it took a long time to edge his way through; the other doorway was blocked up by a number of packing-cases. He saw, over people's heads, an omnibus just about to drive off.

"Hang it! that is my omnibus; I did not want to miss that. I shall be late." He said this under his breath, but audibly, for he was impatient with the crowd.

"It is my omnibus, too," said a gentleman at his elbow, "but it's of no use to try for it."

Norman Ruthven was of another opinion. He backed again out of the crowd, and clambered, in the most undignified manner, over the packing-cases, and succeeded in catching the omnibus.

"Full, sir!"

And indeed it was full, people standing, Glasgow fashion, all down the middle of the omnibus, in addition to all the seats being occupied.

"Never mind, I'll stand on the steps," said Norman, and, good as his word, he hopped up; and the other gentleman, when he emerged from the crowd, saw already at some little distance this particular omnibus on the bridge over the Clyde, going along at a good pace towards the Broomielaw. On the step stood the gentleman with

the small black bag ; and standing in Bridge Street, waiting for another omnibus, the stranger said to himself, "A determined fellow that !"

The second thing that happened that morning was, that Dulcie asked Ruby for some red worsted.

It must be said of the two girls that Ruby was the tidy, careful one, who put things away when she had finished with them, and who, consequently, knew where to find anything when she wanted it. Dulcie always calculated on this in the coolest manner, and expected her to supply all her wants.

Dulcie got her red worsted and a big needle, and shut herself up in the solitude of the bedroom, and stitched in large red letters "Dulcie" on the lining inside the black velvet hat.

And the third and last matter of import which happened on that Monday morning, was the departure of Maurice Ingram for Shiskin.

They were all sorry to part with him, for all alike had taken very much to him ; the traces of his recent illness alone would have made them eager to do anything they could for him ; but he was so pleasant-mannered, so bright, and so gentlemanly, that they were one and all really sorry to say "good-by" to him, and were quite pleased when he said that very likely he should manage to come and take lodgings at Brodick, and do some sketching there, a little later on.

Only one voice was silent when he said this—the only voice in the group he had been listening for ; but the two girls and Harold Pierrepont were going to walk as far as the top of the hill with him, so that he might not have so far to walk alone.

As they walked all together up the hill, Maurice Ingram was trying hard to steel his heart and fortify his mind against those velvety brown eyes and the pretty, piquant face ; but by-and-by he began to find out that she was bestowing very little notice on him. She and Harold Pierrepont had resumed their pleasant, playful banter, and he listened amused and laughing, for to him this was a new phase in Dulcie ; but then he began to think it

would be still more amusing if some of this pleasantry were bestowed upon himself.

On the whole, he was not quite contented with the walk, and the top of the hill was in sight, and Ruby said, "We must say good-by in another few moments." This was tiresome; and the top gained, they all sat down on the heather to get breath.

Dulcie presently leant back and began peering down among the roots of the heather, and getting her fingers down between the bits of moss, when suddenly she found one of her hands pinned closely, and the same voice which had whispered to her the night before, said, "Good-by, Dulcie, don't forget me till I come back!"

And then, aloud, the same voice said, "Now, I really must not keep you any longer, and I heartily thank you for coming so far with me, and for all your kindness to me."

And after a hand-shaking all round, he was gone down the deep glen before them.

The others sat for a little longer, and Dulcie began to turn over the leaves of Ruby's sketch-book, which had, of course, formed one of the company. By-and-by she came upon a little bit of common bracken fern. "Ruby, how comes this here?" said she.

"Oh, I had utterly forgotten it. Do you not remember on Saturday afternoon, in the Fairies' Glen, you said you wanted to pick a fern 'in memoriam'? Well, whilst you were gone, I thought I would do the same, and I pulled up a bit of a tiny bracken; then, just as I was putting it in my book, we heard you scream, and I dare-say you never got your bit of fern after all."

"No, I did not. Oh, I will carry your book, I have nothing in my hands." For they had risen to return homewards.

Dulcie rose to her feet, still retaining the sketch-book; and before following them, she looked down the glen road. She plainly saw at some distance a black figure; he was stopping; she felt sure he could see her red cloak, for she knew that scarlet intensifies with distance; the backs of the others were turned, so, standing on a

knoll of heather, she held aloft her white handkerchief. In an instant her signal was returned, and without waiting to renew it, she ran after the other, singing, as she went down the hill, a bit of the old song called "Logie of Buchan"—

"He said, think na lang, lassie, though I gang awa',
For I'll come back and see thee, in spite of them a'."

By-and-by, at a turn in the road, Harold Pierrepont suggested that Ruby should try and draw a queer little bridge, and Dulcie having assured them that she should not find it at all tedious to wait, gave up the sketch-book to her sister.

"Dulcie, you stupid child," said Ruby in another moment, "you have lost the 'in memoriam' bit of fern out of my book."

"Oh, I am so sorry," was the answer. "Do forgive me!"

Ruby would have been somewhat astonished could she have seen, a little later, when she was busy and eager over her drawing, what Dulcie was about on the other side of the rocks. She had taken a little gold heart-shaped locket which she wore on a bit of velvet round her neck, and untied the velvet, and with the point of a pin was busily trying whether she could not get the glass which covered one-half of the inside, out. She tried so long and so patiently, that any one who knew Dulcie would have been mightily astonished; and when her efforts were crowned with success, she doubled up into the locket a crumpled bit of bracken fern, the commonest fern that grows.

On the other side of that hill, Maurice Ingram was toiling along, scarce mindful of the way or its distance. Dulcie was before him, with her soft dark eyes and her dimples, all the way. "I must write to them; they are expecting to hear. What on this earth shall I say? Up till Saturday I thought all things were going better for me, and that there would be no more difficulties in my way; but now it seems to me that the difficulties are going to close in and round me in all earnest."

That night, sitting in his little lodging at Shiskin, he got out his writing materials, and sat before them at the table. He sat and thought, and took up his pen, then put it down again, and took out his pocket-book, and took from it a little bit of black silk with the name "Dulcie" stitched in large red worsted on it.

He held it at some distance, and he held it quite close to his eyes, and he stared and stared at it, and only said, "She worked it." Then his eyes fell on the letter-paper and pen and ink before him—"I can't write to them; hang them all, hang her, hang me, hang everything and everybody!"

And he cast his arms on to the table, and his head on his arms. By-and-by he lifted his face; it was weary with the fatigue of the long walk, thanks to that recent illness. He looked round the room, then at the letter-paper again.

"I will write," he said. Then he again took up his pocket-book to replace the bit of black silk. He looked at it once more, and was just about to raise it to his lips, when he suddenly stopped himself—

"No," he said, "I won't do that, or I could not possibly write afterwards."

Strangely at times we sophisticate with ourselves!

CHAPTER XI.

A HELPLESS RUDDERLESS SHIP.

THE world wagged on in its own humdrum fashion—for, take our life as we will, it is but a constant repetition, like a clock, like the waves of the sea, like day and night succeeding one another.

Those things that are new to us happened yesterday to our neighbour on the left, and likely enough, will happen to our neighbour on the right to-morrow.

While clocks went on ticking, and the waves of the sea chased one another towards the shores, and night went on succeeding day, a letter was crossing sea and

land between the Highlands and the Rhineland. But imagination and thought travel quicker than machinery, and before the letter reaches its destination we find ourselves in an old German town called Handorf.

It is a quaint, picturesque old place, lying sheltered amongst the valleys of the Rhineland. It is a small enough town when you reach it, although a place of some importance; but it lies out of any direct route, and causes you no little trouble to get there, particularly if you do not happen to be very fluent in the German language.

Maurice Ingram the elder, and with him all that remained to him of the home circle, when he quietly thought over all that he had gone through to reach it, of all the many changes on the road, of the bewildering volleys of Rhineland German which they, a helpless unprotected family of English people, had had to answer as best they might, he wondered, nay, he marvelled, that they should have safely arrived at Handorf.

The season for the baths and mineral waters was passed; but they did not desire to return home for the winter, and the doctors had recommended Handorf as a comfortable, well-placed and sheltered town, where the invalid would feel the rigours of the winter season as little as possible.

Mr. Ingram himself had but little German at his command, and for any assistance in getting his wants and wishes attended to, he relied on Una and Alice as he had never before relied on them. At home, where people spoke a respectable, comprehensible language, he had laughed at and derided the girls' efforts at German; but landed abroad, when they, in their small triumphs, reminded him of this, he persisted in ignoring the fact of his ever having laughed at their German.

Mrs. Ingram's one idea was the luggage; and whenever any one spoke to them on their travels, she instantly assured them in English that they had not such a thing as tobacco with them, nor uncut silks, nor marmalade. She further assured them that they were perfectly at liberty to examine all the luggage, although nearly every-

body had trusted them, and they had never had the things really and thoroughly searched.

At the same time she had no desire that the luggage should be examined, for there was one secret weight on her mind, and this was quite a little library of books in the editions of Mr. Bernhard Tauchnitz of Leipzig. She was very fond of these editions; they were a pleasant size to hold, and the type was clear and good; besides there was a contraband sensation about collecting these books that was positively pleasant, and there was nothing she enjoyed more than packing up her library of them for travel; she would tell you with pride, past how many custom-houses, and how many times journeying to and from England, she had carried them safely and unsuspected.

"There is one part of your boxes," she would tell her friends in confidence, "there is one part of your boxes where you may put anything you like, particularly Tauchnitz editions, with perfect security, and that is, nearly at the bottom and in the middle. Do not forget that it must be in the middle, and nearly at the bottom of the boxes. Those custom-house officers have a way of taking out the trays of the boxes, and plunging their hands down the side, shuffling the things about, and patting them down; then they plunge their hands down the other side, and satisfied, they then close them up. So you see you need have no anxiety at all about your books, and really it is such a pleasant edition."

As for the two girls, they spent their time in looking out for things new and strange, and were only too delighted when anything in this shape presented itself. It became food for talk, a subject for long letters home to England, and material wherewith to fill up pages of journal.

In appearance Una was certainly handsome, the only one of the four sisters who resembled their brother Maurice, but she was very small and thin, and her otherwise good looks were marred by a certain peevish sharpness, caused, likely enough, by ceaseless delicacy. And then the poor curved spine, the consciousness of which

infirmity she never lost for one instant, nor had she yet learned to bear patiently the affliction caused by an accident in early childhood.

"It is such a pity Una is deformed," Alice said so often, "or she would have been the flower of the flock. And then her delicacy makes her so ill-tempered!"

And in truth, Una's temper was a trying one to bear, and Mrs. Ingram lamented and mourned over her infirmities, far more than she rejoiced and was thankful for her other three healthy married daughters. Even they had been, each in their way, "a trial" to her, as she was fond of saying.

Brought up with few cares, and little or nothing to do, Mrs. Ingram, like many another body similarly circumstanced, made cares and troubles for herself out of nothing, so that when the realities of care and trouble, which lie in wait for us all, came upon her, like the shepherd of old crying "Wolf!" her friends failed to gather round her and give her the help of sympathy. Now the poor woman really needed all that sympathy and friends could give her, for her trouble was sore and deep, and hard to bear; it had attacked her where she was most vulnerable, most sensitive—in the person of her only son, Maurice.

Her other children, collectively, were "the girls." With her it had always been "Maurice and the children," "Maurice and the girls," "Maurice and the others," "Maurice and the rest of them." It was he alone, the apple of her eye, who had kept her heart from closing up in selfishness. For him she would have sacrificed the girls. Alice, husband, home, happiness, all else that made life dear—all this, and more besides, had it been possible, for this one son, Maurice.

When her husband's patience had at length broken down altogether under the last greatest trial, and he said he would see Maurice no more, for he had broken his heart, it was she who interceded and entreated for him with the long-suffering patience of a mother, until she had won something like a pardon for him, if he could with time prove himself worthy of it; but in the mean-

while he must keep away, and let his name be almost unmentioned among them.

This was a hard command on the womenfolk of the family, who were all slaves to him, and who loved him with a love which, it sometimes seems, that these prodigal natures alone can excite, and there was not a book that they read, or a thing that they did, but it somehow called up memories of Maurice.

And Alice ; we have so often mentioned her name without giving any account of her ? She was the only child of an old friend of Mr. Ingram's. Her mother had died at her birth, and her father a few years later ; and Mr. Ingram had been left guardian to the little solitary child and her money, with the promise that she was to be brought up a Protestant, and not a Roman Catholic.

This was, of course, a matter of difficulty in a Roman Catholic family, and people said it was rather hard on Mrs. Ingram, who plainly said it was "a trial" to her. So they wondered how she would manage. But the girls were educated differently. Mrs. Ingram's daughters were all placed at a convent, and Alice Young was sent to Protestant schools. She never remained very long at any one of them, for she had a habit of saying the girls at school were horrid, and the mistresses detestable. After this a new school would be found for her, generally ending in the same result after a while.

By this it will seem that Alice Young was somewhat of a spoilt child, and indeed it was the case. They were very good to her at home, and petted and made much of her ; even old Father O'Brien, from the Roman Catholic church at Rolingstoke, the nearest town to the Ingrams' home, was kind and good-tempered to the little fledgeling of a heretic religion that had come among them.

Alice was so happy at home, and so wretched when the time came to return to school, that many a time she begged to be allowed to have a governess at home—anything rather than leave them. But, by the advice of Father O'Brien, Mrs. Ingram decided that, pleased as she would be to keep her at home and to gratify all the child's wishes that were reasonable, she would not be

doing her duty were she to keep her exposed to daily Catholic influence in a Catholic family ; she must therefore continue to be brought up by Protestant people in Protestant schools.

Alice knew that there was no help for it ; so, during her childhood and school life, she spent her time in counting up weeks, days, and hours, to "the next holidays," when she could have home comforts and the home companionship of the Ingram girls ; and they had a habit of comparing the schools to the convent, and the one idea of Alice's life was, "How delightful it must be in the convent ! I wish they would let me go there, it must be so much nicer than school."

Above all, in the holidays she had Maurice for a play-fellow ; he was a good deal older than she was, but that only made his patronage all the more flattering and delightful, and she was always ready to be his most humble little slave. Oftentimes she would go to church with him—to accompany him was the greatest possible happiness, for some people would hardly credit the depths to which a child's love and admiration can go. But she only said, "I like to go to church with Maurice."

Time went on in his humdrum fashion, the same things happened over and over again, and the consequence was that Alice was nearly one-and-twenty, when she would become mistress of her fortune, and she was going to be married to Maurice. All through the time of trouble and anxiety, when Maurice had fulfilled their worst fears, those fears which they had never even breathed amongst themselves or to Father O'Brien, the girl's love and faith had never swerved or turned aside from Maurice ; she had clung to him, and believed in his vows of amendment with firm tenacity, even when his mother's heart was well nigh broken. And Mrs. Ingram had been thankful to the girl—thankful to her for having yet faith that the good would prevail in her weak, erring son, and for still thinking of marrying him, and setting her fresh young life of vigour and hope on the turn of a die.

And it was nothing more : unstable as water, and

weak ; so weak was his character that it was like a weathercock moved by each wandering wind that chanced to blow, a mere feather in the air ; or like a helpless rudderless ship tossed hither and thither at the will of the strongest waves. Mr. Ingram when he had denounced Maurice, had forbidden Alice ever to think of him again in the light of a future husband ; that must be over and ended for ever. His old friend, Alice's father, would, he said, turn in his grave, did he fail so shamefully in the trust he had undertaken, as to allow his one child to ruin her every glad healthful prospect in life, by marrying such a pitiful creature as his son Maurice.

Not a word could he get from her on the subject, and he had to content himself with the thought that while he lived he would take means to provide that this should not come to pass ; he told her this, and assured and comforted himself with the thought. While he lived—and how long might that be ? for the chilly, creeping touch of sickness had reached him, and he trembled and shivered up beneath it, and thought over the troubles of his life. Did he think of the vow he had made relative to Maurice and Alice ? ay, often enough, and the sick man lay thinking, even whilst they imagined he slept, and crept about on tiptoe for fear of waking him ; he planned ways by which his influence and desires might yet govern them after he had left them, that then as now, the faith he had promised his friend should be carried out to the end.

"Perhaps," he sometimes thought, "she will forget him ; she may come to understand his unconquerable weakness ; she may come to care for some more worthy man."

Now and then, although the times were few and far between, he would yearn for the presence of his only son, and think over all that the boy had been to him in his younger days ; of the hopes that had come with his birth ; of the buoyant merry childhood and boyhood, when there seemed every prospect of time bringing fulfilment to these and all bright hopes. And he recalled the indescribable charm that Maurice carried with his

presence. "Every one felt it ; it was the same with all who came in contact with him," thought the old man, his eye kindling with the thought, for there was yet a spark of pride in his only son—one spark, well nigh suffocated, but not yet dead. Not yet ! and thank Heaven for the springs of hope ever ready to flow ! Not dead yet, nor while there was life left in him.

At these times he would respect Alice's resolution, and call her a brave high-spirited girl in his own mind, and again dream over the possibilities of the future. But it was after such times as these that he was most strict, and most severe in his denunciations of his son, and most determined that there should never be anything between him and Alice. He little knew of how strong a battle he would have to fight, of how great a power youth and love are for aged hands to grapple with. He would not have felt so sanguine of preventing this marriage could he have known all that Mrs. Ingram and Alice felt, ay, and Father O'Brien too, for it was no secret to the family circle that Alice was but waiting for her twenty-first birthday to declare herself a Roman Catholic, and to be publicly received into that Church.

Una, of course, being so much younger than her brother and sisters and Alice, a great deal of the family troubles and trials were kept from her, and she was never present at any of the long serious talks which at one time were so terribly frequent. But she was so sharp and inquisitive, that she knew far more than they suspected she did, and in reality there was little that passed without her knowledge. Her father, for her own and all their sakes, wished that as much as it was possible should be kept from the child, and indeed she looked but little more ; and Alice, with whom she was of course more than any one else, had too much pride in Maurice and too much reticence where he was concerned, ever to speak of fears and troubles brought about by him before Una or any one except his mother, and Father O'Brien. Beyond this, somehow or other Una and Alice were not very great friends and confidants ; there were some years' difference in their ages, and each in turn had been a spoilt indulged child, and

spoilt indulged children do not appreciate the presence of other spoilt indulged children. It may have been this, or it may have been that Alice did not bear quite so patiently with Una's difficult temper, but the fact of their not being very great friends was, Mrs. Ingram said, "one of her trials!"

Not that there were anything like disputes or quarrels existing, but they preferred any one else's companionship to each other's. One sore point between them was the engagement between Maurice and Alice. Una was devotedly fond of her brother, and bitterly jealous of his love for Alice and of the confidences which she felt sure were bestowed upon her, to the exclusion of herself; Alice was sore about this, for, poor girl! she had had enough to try her connected with her engagement, without the additional bitterness of Una's sarcastic and spiteful little remarks.

It was pleasant enough in this German Rhineland in spite of the late autumn weather; for Handorf was a dry, bright little town, and you were not oppressed with a sense of dead leaves and weird-looking trees. There were but few trees in the town, and the country round was open and healthy. The inhabitants of the town were by no means a speculative race; they contented themselves with working very industriously during working hours, and being tremendously cheerful and happy during play hours; therein following without deviating one iota from the lives led by their fathers and grand-fathers.

There was a winter theatre and a summer theatre, and one concert room, and for a very long time there had been regularly the same audience and the same performers at each. Besides this, there were innumerable coffee-houses in and about the neighbourhood. These are places of recreation not confined to summer and fine weather, as English people are in the habit of imagining; for in the coldest winter weather you can go to a coffee-house and enjoy yourself very much in the cosy warm rooms, the same rooms which in summer stand open to the grounds, and into which people rush for shelter in

sudden showers, or, as often as not, they are used to dance in.

The Ingrams had very comfortable apartments in the largest hotel in the town, and Mr. Ingram's health having been pretty good since their arrival, and Mrs. Ingram's only fresh trials having been the German stoves, dinners, and beds, the girls moreover having got on better than usual together, they had been very happy in this out-of-the-world town.

Waiting breakfast is always a tedious sort of affair. Una was nursing a pet dog, and Alice was reading one of Mrs. Ingram's Tauchnitz editions. She was evidently impatient for Mrs. Ingram's appearance in the breakfast-room; she threw down her book, and once more looked at the breakfast on the table and the letters beside the plate, then she walked to the window and looked out down into the square of the busy market-place below.

As she stood in the full morning light of the window, you had a good sight of her, and it was a pleasant sight to look upon. She was very tall, a good deal over middle height, and proportionately largely made; but she was well put together, and notwithstanding her height, very graceful; her head was well set on her shoulders, and she carried herself splendidly; altogether she was a noble-looking girl. It was quite an English girl's face, clear pink and white complexion, hazel eyes, and pale brown hair, a pretty face with a sweet expression.

"Mother is late this morning," she said to Una.

"I wish she would make haste," was the answer, "I hate waiting for breakfast."

She had scarcely said these words when the door opened, and a tall elegant woman entered the room.

Clearly it was from their mother that the Ingram children had come by their good looks. Maurice was as much like his mother as it was possible for two people to be; even in Una's pinched, pointed little face, there were lines and shapes entirely her mother's.

No sooner had Mrs. Ingram entered the room than her brows drew together and a worried expression came into her handsome eyes.

"Good morning, girls," she said. "Is there anything like a fire in that dreadful-looking stove there? I have not had one bit of sleep in the night again. Really these beds are enough to try any one. I do wish I had never come abroad."

"Good morning, mother," said Alice; "isn't it a beautiful day?"

"Mother, there is a letter from Maurice," said Una.

CHAPTER XII.

ALICE WRITES A LETTER.

THE breakfast stood untouched on the table, even Una's impatience had disappeared, and the two girls sat motionless, awaiting news from Maurice's letter.

"Is there any letter enclosed for me or Alice?" inquired Una.

"No, there is only one letter."

The two girls took this intelligence differently. Alice was somewhat hurt; this was the third letter from Maurice without any enclosure for her. Una was slightly disappointed that Maurice had not answered her letter, even by a few words, but on the whole she was glad there was nothing for Alice.

Mrs. Ingram read the last words, and looked up with a sigh, and said, "I do wish that boy would write more serious letters, I dislike these unsatisfactory letters excessively. There is the letter, Alice, you had better read it while I pour out the coffee."

"Read it aloud, please," said Una.

Alice looked across the table at her; she would far rather have read that letter to herself first, and Una knew this, but without a moment's pause she began.

"You have been expecting to hear from me for some time, I know, mother dear; not that it is so very long since I last favoured you with an epistle, but by the letter I had from you—so quickly followed by Una's, and you

both took such care to tell me the exact address, and hoped I had not lost it—you seem to be enjoying yourselves tolerably. Judging from Una's letter, coffee-houses seem to be her particular dissipation. Here, in this out-of-the-world village of Shiskin, I have nothing half so exciting in the way of amusement. Sketching certainly is a great attraction here, for the scenery is so lovely that it would tempt any one to use pencil and brush on it. I have been painting more than I ever did in my life before since I came here; I took to it in the beginning, as there was literally nothing else a fellow could do, when he didn't go sea-fishing or walking on the hills; and it always seems to me an aimless sort of thing to be climbing up to the tops of the hills and then getting down again, the more so when you are all alone. Well, the more I painted the more I became fascinated with the art. I have not only begun a great many sketches, but I have finished them; and some of them are not so bad as they might be. Sea-fishing is not bad here, always provided you do not get on to a bank where there are conger eels about. As soon as they come about your lines the other fellows all make off, and you bring in these great wriggling brutes one after the other; and the people here give them to the pigs instead of eating them, which is a fine thing to be certain of, because I should not like one of these horrors served up for my breakfast. The other day I had an awfully jolly walk, with a strange termination. I set off for Brodick, and thought I would walk over the hills, and find my way, as there is no path. Well, to cut matters short, I wandered and lost my way, as people genercally do here if they go poking about alone in the hills. I hadn't the faintest conception where I was, and was just beginning to feel completely done up, and to wish I had brought some grub with me, when I made a false step and fell down a sandy bank into a burn. You never saw such a place for burns as this is; you can't go ten yards without coming on one of them of some size or other, from fine large waterfalls down to very small young ones. By the time I had scrambled out, I was so tired, that when I sat down to rest I fell asleep immedi-

ately. I was awakened by some one stumbling over me, and at first I could not conceive what had happened or where I was, then I was thoroughly glad to see a human being again; indeed, if it had not been for this party of people who found me, I cannot say what would have become of me. They were no end good and kind, and insisted on taking me home with them, for it seemed that I was fifteen miles from home, and there were no mortal means of getting there that night, and of course walking was out of the question for me. I cannot tell you the comfort it was to see a fire and a bed; and I was no sooner in bed than a jolly old Scotchman, with one of those thoroughly honest, straightforward faces, came up with a glass of steaming hot toddy. I shall never forget the amaze on his face when I told him that I did not want it. He said that, if it *was* a fact that I was a teetotaler, it wasn't a time to be talking nonsense about it: and that if I didn't take it I should just catch my death. But I neither took it, nor caught my death, and I stopped with the old ladies and their friends until Monday,—did you ever hear of such hospitality to an utter stranger?—and on Monday we parted great friends. I think it probable I may later on take lodgings in Brodick, so that, as the winter advances, I may have some little society when I wish for it, and it will be a better place for sketching than Shiskin; besides this, I have another motive in wishing to be at Brodick; there is a Mr. Pierrepont, a well-known clever painter, staying there, a great friend of the Misses McInnes, my kind old lady friends, and it will be a great thing for me if I can get some hints from him, or even see his sketches and watch him paint. He and the two Misses Duncan walked a part of the way home with me. The Misses Duncan are nieces of the old ladies. I am so glad to hear that my father's health is better, and have no doubt but Handorf, which you say is such a pleasant, dry little town, will be better for him during the winter months than Hunstanleigh, with its dead leaves and muddy fields. I feel that when we meet again there will be a great change for the better in all of us. For myself I can tell you I am greatly stronger in

all ways. I know you will believe what I say. I have not heard from Alice for some time. Lots of love to her and Una, not forgetting yourself, mother, dear.

"MAURICE."

"Is that all?" thought Alice to herself, as she laid the letter on the table; "no more message even than that?"

"I call it a most unsatisfactory letter," said Mrs. Ingram again.

"Poor fellow!" said Una; "you all seem very dissatisfied with him. I really do not see what more he could have said; he tells one as much as there is to tell of what he is doing; but in such a retired, quiet life as Maurice is leading now, there is very little to tell. I was a little mystified now and then; I couldn't quite follow the descriptions. I don't know who these McInnes and Duncans are. Somebody is somebody else's niece, that is all I could make out."

"The Miss Duncans are the nieces of the old ladies," said Alice; "but perhaps they are as old as the aunts."

"That I am sure they are not," said Una.

"How do you know?"

"Why, doesn't he say that this Mr. Pierrepont and the Miss Duncans walked the half of fifteen miles with him? and old ladies that I've ever heard of don't do that. I should think they were young and pretty too; if they had been ugly he would have said so, and made some nonsensical remarks about them or the things they did or said. When men admire girls, they don't say anything about them, at any rate not to other girls."

"The letter was to mother," said Alice.

"Well, he knew that we should read it."

"You are a wonderful child of your age, Una."

"Am I a child? I am fifteen—in my sixteenth year. In the eyes of the law I am an infant, I know; but surely not in the eyes of society, unless society is as ridiculous as the law."

"I should think you knew about as much of one as of the other."

"I know that I have heard Blanche's husband, who is

a lawyer, say, that every law is like a most imposing barricade ; but nearly every lawyer can run his clients through the blockade, through some hole or corner, even if it be in the ditch under the very barricade ; therefore laws must be ridiculous. As for society, we certainly did not have much of it at Hunstanleigh ; the papas hate going out, and only go because they are lugged out by their wives ; and the mammas only go to take their daughters, and they hate any other girl who sings and plays better than their daughters ; and if they sing and play badly, they sneer about it ; and the daughters themselves only go to show their dresses and chignons, and on the chance of 'somebody nice to flirt with' turning up. That is what I know of law and society."

"Well, my dear Una," said her mother, "I think you will come to have a better opinion of society when you have had a little more experience of it. But we are wandering from Maurice's letter. What a mercy those Scotch people found him ! Only imagine his being asleep in wet clothes on the moors, and he only just recovering from that frightful illness ! What a mercy to be sure ! Really, I feel inclined to write a letter to them, and thank them for their kindness and hospitality, only one does not know what sort of people they may be, or how they would take it. Now I have heard at times such extraordinary tales of the frightful prejudices of these Presbyterian Scotch Free Church, or whatever they are, towards us, that one might be doing more harm than good by having anything to do with them."

"I wouldn't write," said Una ; "there is not the slightest occasion. You may depend upon it these McInnes and Duncan people were only too delighted at the excitement in that out-of-the-way place ; besides, that sort of hospitality is nothing unusual to them."

"Mother, I wish you would write, just a tiny letter, if it is only three lines."

"Oh, of course ; if I say anything, Alice always gives herself a good deal of trouble to contradict it," said Una.

"Do you think I had better write ?" said Mrs. Ingran ; "it is so difficult to know what is the right thing to do. My first impression was to write, I must say."

"Then do write, mother: think of what *might* have happened but for them and their timely hospitality. If he had remained sleeping there long, he would certainly have caught a chill; and if he had been lost and out on the moor all night, it would have been certain death to him. Even if they had sent him on the fifteen miles in a carriage that night, that would have been just as dangerous to a person as delicate as poor Maurice must still be. I think, mother, we have a great deal to thank them for, and a few words in a letter would be no trouble to us, and is due to them."

"You are quite right, Alice, quite; it is shocking to think of. What a dangerous place that Scotland is, with its burns and moors! I dare say lots of people get lost continually and never heard of again in those wilds. I shall not have a moment's peace now I know what sort of a country it is. I wish those old ladies and artists would let him come and stop near them, so that they could see that he didn't get lost or tumble into rivers and get wet."

"Wherever the rivers are, people are apt to get wet when they tumble into them," said Una.

"Well," said her mother, "it makes it none the less dangerous. I will write at once. Couldn't I say something to the old ladies about asking the artist to look after him if he came and stopped near them?"

"Well, mother, no; I don't think you can. Suppose you just write them a very short polite letter, merely thanking them; and then if you wish Maurice to move, you had better write to him and mention it."

"I think you are right again, Alice. I will do so immediately, if you will get me my writing-case."

By this time the breakfast was quite finished; and as Alice rose to fetch Mrs. Ingram's writing materials, Una said, "Alice is in her glory, quite happy, as she always is, when she has managed everything to her fancy, and got everything her own way."

"Una, my dear child, you should not say that," said her mother; "you must acknowledge that Alice has been perfectly right in what she has said; but Alice,

dear," she continued, "I have not time to write both the letters. Will you just write to Maurice, as short a letter as you like, merely to say that I think it would be advisable, all things considered, if he were to move to Brodick, as it would doubtless be pleasanter for him to be within reach of his friends? Of course you must not say anything about their looking after him, and seeing that he does not get lost about the hills; naturally enough, a young man would not like the idea; but if you will just write those few lines for me, I shall be much obliged."

"Mother always takes it as a matter of course that if any one is to write to Maurice, Alice must be the one," thought Una. "Surely, because a man is engaged to be married at some future and far-away day, he is not to leave off having any relations and sisters, who have always belonged to him up till that time! it is horrid and meaningless."

And Alice sat down at a queer little tall table, with four long straight legs, in the window that overlooked the market-place of the busy little German town. She took her seat to write the letter to Maurice. Una had said Alice has it all her own way, but she was wrong; Alice had an instinctive feeling that Maurice had better remain at Shiskin. She did not want him to go to Brodick and be near his friends. The letters he had written to her from Shiskin had been few and far between; probably when he was taken up with his new friends they would be fewer still. At any rate it should be a very short letter, merely that which she was bidden to write; for had he not neglected to write to her?

Feeling that she would regret every word that she wrote, and wondering at herself the while, she finished this letter:—

"MY DEAR MAURICE,—Mother has just received your letter, and has been made very anxious by its contents; your account of your adventure alone on the hills, and your loneliness at Shiskin. You mention the kindness of your new friends, and we all feel very very grateful to

them, and mother wishes you would go and stay near them, and have the benefit of their friendship and the painter's advice.

"Love from

"ALICE."

A short letter, and quickly written ; but Alice lingered over the direction and the folding up of the letter. "Why should it be sent?" she said to herself. "Surely he will please himself and make his own plans, in spite of this silly letter." Anyhow, the letter would not make much difference ; so she closed it, and then proposed to Una that they should go out together and post the letters.

"There, Alice," said Mrs. Ingram, "just read that and see if it will do for the old ladies."

Alice read :—

"DEAR MADAM,—I cannot resist writing to thank you for your seasonable and most timely hospitality to my son Maurice Ingram. I have heard that such hospitality to strangers is by no means uncommon in Scotland. I can only say that it is lucky for Maurice that it is so. He may have told you that he is only slowly recovering from a very serious and painful illness, so that he was doubly liable to receive injury from the position in which you found him. He speaks of moving to Brodick, in order that he may pursue his sketching to greater advantage ; he also mentions a Mr. Pierrepont, whose advice on this point he wishes to benefit by. Of course this would be of the most valuable assistance to him, and I know he is very lonely at Shiskin, which I believe is a most out-of-the-way place. Once more I thank you for your kindness, for which I must sign myself, dear Madam,

"Yours gratefully,

"LAURA INGRAM."

"That will do beautifully, mother ! come, Una."

And whilst time went on in its humdrum fashion, like a clock, like the waves of the sea, like day and night, letters were again crossing the sea ; but this time from the Rhineland to the Highlands.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT FELL TO HER LOT.

to Scotland, to Auntie Bell and Auntie Jean. It is "boat-day," and Auntie Bell stands on the quay, looking with anxiety the steamer buffeting with winds and waves, and struggling into the bay. It is about a fortnight since that steamer took Norman Ruthven over to Ardrossan, and since then what the Arranites call "coarse wather" has set in, blustering violent winds, incessant rain and heavy seas, and the last bonnie summer tints have been washed away for good and all for the year, and there is the dreary winter coming with long strides. Quickly as the autumn gloaming fades, the change from autumn to winter is as sudden amongst the hills; and a fortnight of this "coarse wather" takes away the last lingering leaves from the trees and every bit of the spring colour from the moors. And when the mist sets in, it is only to leave winter printed on the face of the sea.

The steamer has had hard work crossing to-day. It is not safe enough in the bay, under the shelter of the mountain, but away, beyond the point, the watchers can see the white horses; and as Auntie Bell beholds them, she shakes her head and presses her elbows to her sides to keep her big plaid.

The rain had ceased for a short time, only to raise false hopes, for it intended to come down in a more determined manner than ever as soon as it had had breathing space.

The steamer came in as near the shore as she dared venture, and the little boats rowed out to her, and there came the bustle and excitement of landing the passengers and their packages. All this was a treat to Auntie Bell, and of which, strange to say, she never tired; to her there was no sameness in the passengers, no sameness in the winter to the land; no sameness in the dirty old letter-bag; no sameness in the scramble for newspapers. The passengers were all known to her; and as often as not they

would bring with them some little parcel, a commission they had been fulfilling for her in Glasgow or Ardrossan. But the chief of chief interests to her was the letter-bag and its sacred dirty straps; until that was safely out of the little boat and on to the quay, Miss Bell was nervous, nervous for fear it should tumble overboard, or anything equally horrible happen to it. When she had seen it safely on its way to the post-office, she would turn about; and it was a good thing to see Miss Bell run towards the penny-boy and the little crowd he had about him, her penny held out before her as she went.

And with her copy of the *Glasgow Herald* tight in her hands, she would stroll along towards the post-office. She always strolled along whatever the weather, for it was no use hurrying, or the letters would not be ready for delivery.

It was a wild, boisterous day, and there were not many people on the quay. The newspapers were not all fetched, and Robert Hamilton had to lock them up in the store till they were called for. And Miss Bell, having got the paper, turned about to go towards the post, when she came face to face with Harold Pierrepont. She had not seen him for two days, and her face brightened considerably.

"Harold Pierrepont, is that you?" she said.

"No other, Miss Bell. You are brave to defy the elements on such a day as this."

"Oh, I don't care so very much for the weather. Perhaps I shouldn't have come out but for the boat; that is a duty I never neglect when it is in any way possible to come out."

What she had to do with it in her own mind, it is impossible to conceive, but from long force of habit she had come to regard it seriously as a duty.

"Ah, quite right of you, Miss Bell; you always used to be famous for not caring much for weather. It is certainly a good thing for your health to do so. Does Miss Jean always stay at home?"

"Well, Jean is more mindful of the weather than I am—that is to say, when she is not looking after the beasts.

She often says that I shall get ill venturing out in all weathers. But then I am not afraid. You see, Jean is a great deal older than I am," she said, softly, and looked up at his face.

"Is she?" said he.

Miss Bell was mortified. But after a short pause, he added :

"Of course she is. I remember that when I think of long ago."

The meaning of this was plain to her. In those old days the difference in age had been perceptible plainly enough ; but as the years had glided on, Miss Jean's energy, mind, and activity, had kept her a brighter, younger woman, while Miss Bell had faded gradually, and her nervous, anxious timidity had aged her until it would have been difficult to say which was the elder of the two.

"Do they send you down all alone to do all the business?" said Harold Pierrepont gently, almost tenderly. He could not have given an exact reason for this, but somehow he always felt that he must speak to her in this tone. And she felt the inflection in his voice ; it was a greater treat than even boat-days to her ; and with a very sweet smile on her pleasant mouth, she said :

"They do not care to come down unless they are expecting somebody or a parcel, and I like to come. So it is all right."

"But you must get tired of it," said he.

"Tired of it ! Oh no ! Why, I have been down to the quay, and have fetched the letters for about thirty years. I should not know what getting tired of it meant. Why, you must remember my fetching the letters twenty years ago, Harold."

"To be sure I do. And have you fetched them ever since?"

"Ever since. It was what fell to my lot," she said, with a half smile, half sigh.

"Ever since," he repeated to himself ; "what a life !" and he looked over the sea amongst the white horses, and

tried to realise what her life could have been. "What a sweet dear girl she was," he said to himself. "At least, she wasn't ever a girl, exactly; that is to say, when I knew her. I wonder if I ever was really spooney about her, and whether she ever was spooney about me. It is a queer world, it is, by Jove!" he added, staring at the waves. And then he thought of his life. Twenty years had passed by, leaving but little mark. He had made a name, and some fame, and some money; but as he stood looking over the water, he could not see what good it had done him, or that he was any the happier for it, or that anything particular had happened even to him; only that twenty of the best years of his life were gone.

So he pulled the end of his moustache and looked down again on Miss Bell, who was standing beside him, not impatient, but happy, and waiting his pleasure; and he said:

"May I walk with you, Miss Bell? You see I know all about where you are going to, and I do not see why I should not help in the business."

"To be sure, Harold," said Miss Bell, with a bright and unusual ring in her voice, "it will be nothing new. I remember just such another day as this, when you and I walked to the post, and you said that we should be certain to find no letters to reward us for the wild walk, and we had four after all, and you got them away from me, and put them in the crown of your hat, and the wind blew your hat off, and the letters went into the wood, and we had such trouble to find them."

"I remember it now you speak of it," said Harold, laughing; while he said to himself, "What a rum thing she should remember that. I had utterly forgotten it till she reminded me of it."

But, somehow, this anecdote set him thinking of that period generally, and he said:

"Your saying that has made me think of other things I had forgotten. Don't you remember the day when you and I and Minnie went up Goatfell, and she became tired? And then, don't you remember the white pony? Well, Minnie said she had heard of people holding on

by horses' tails to help themselves up hills, and you were frightened the pony would kick ; but Minnie said she would try him, and she got hold of the tail. It was a very long one, and almost touched the ground, and she held on, and the pony didn't mind one scrap, and, as far as the pony could go up the hill, he took Minnie up in this fashion. But she always was a wonderfully plucky girl, was frightened by nothing, and would attempt anything."

"Oh, I remember it so well !" said Miss Bell, walking on briskly and laughing ; "and don't you remember what happened to Minnie as she was quietly stepping along, holding on by the white pony's tail ? He, for some unaccountable reason, made a sudden dart on, and twitched his tail out of her hand, and she was so unprepared for this that she fell forwards into the heather. And the heather was so long that she was completely buried in it, and we looked up and saw the pony, and no Minnie. You and I were walking at a little distance behind. We were so astonished, do you remember ?"

Yes, gradually he remembered, and he said to himself, "So it did happen, and she and I were ever so far behind. Goodness ! what makes her remember all these absurd things ? what will she remember next ? She is a wonderful woman." Then he settled that he would not try to remember any more of these old times ; it never did any good to be raking up dead or sleeping memories.

But Miss Bell was in high spirits, and careless of the gusts of wind and bits of salt spray from the sea. She was just beginning, "Now I remember another thing, Harold, which I am perfectly certain you have entirely forgotten," when all at once, coming down a side-path, they came face to face with Miss Jean.

"Good morning, Harold Pierrepont," she said, adding without an instant's pause, "Bell, woman, look at your tails dragging in the mud, and, I declare, your bonnet is on one side, and the bow standing bolt upright like a cockatoo. It's a mercy I caught you before you appeared in the village, looking such a poor daft creature !"

Then poor Miss Bell's gaiety vanished all in a moment, and instead of being a reflection of the Bell McInnes of long ago, she was in one second the helpless, humble Auntie Bell whom Dulcie and Ruby knew. It was very odd, she thought, that Jean should just turn up when she and Harold Pierpoint were enjoying themselves so much. And then Jean's remarks were always so plain and to the purpose that it was impossible to carry any sentimentality into her company.

Miss Jean said she had had to go to the village on business, and she would now accompany them to the post, as she was so near to it. Then Miss Bell found out that she had been calculating, almost unconsciously to herself, on the walk home along the more sheltered road with Harold Pierpoint and the letters. She heaved a little sigh as she walked along between the other two.

The wind was violent and rude, and they bent their heads and battled with it, screwing up their eyes, and with difficulty getting one leg before the other ; and then it was that Miss Bell's eyes fell on her feet, indeed it would have been impossible to avoid seeing them, and she felt dissatisfied with their appearance. She had on some old boots which were what she called "comfortable about the house ;" over these, according to her constant custom, she had drawn a pair of goloshes which were "roomy," and they gaped at each side of her foot as she bent it. Involuntarily she looked from her foot to her sister's. Now, although Miss Jean's foot was large, it was shapely, and she wore her stout Balmorals with but one end and object, and that was "use ;" "ornament," seldom or never, entered into Miss Jean's head, certainly never in connexion with her own feet. Whether it was John Fullarton, the shoemaker's wonderful making, or whatever it may have been, Miss Jean's boots always looked good, and when John Fullarton got them into his hands again, he said they had been well and regularly worn, alike all over. Now, Miss Bell's boots, do what you would to them, always wore down on one side. And as for the girls, they kicked their boots to pieces in a

manner which Miss Jean said was just frightful to think of.

Miss Bell looked from her sister's foot to her own, and keenly felt that she lost by the comparison. It had never entered her head to think of this before ; but now she wished either that Jean had not joined them, or that Harold Pierrepont was at home, or that she had put on better boots, or that the rude horrid wind would not blow in that manner.

But the wind paid no attention to her wish, nay, it seemed almost to increase ; it buffeted them, it pushed them back, it whistled in their ears, it almost tore their clothes from them, and finally, it reduced Miss Bell to a state as nearly bordering on irritability as she had ever been in her life before.

"What brings you out, Jean?" she said at length.

"Business ; I didn't expect to walk with Mr. Pierrepont or to meet him," said Miss Jean with entire innocence.

"Do you think *I* did?" said Miss Bell, somewhat hotly.

Miss Jean looked at her in silent amaze.

"No ; I didn't think you would be such a fool," she said at length.

Harold Pierrepont could not hear exactly what was said, for the noise of the wind ; but he saw Miss Jean's look at Miss Bell, and he took to pulling his moustache and wishing that they had arrived at some more sheltered spot where he could light a pipe and smoke it.

The post was reached at last ; and after a due amount of waiting about, the letters were handed out. Only one ! after all this waiting and buffeting with the wind there was nothing for Mr. Pierrepont, only a foreign letter, on thin paper, addressed, "Miss McInnes, Brodick." Miss Jean took it, with one long searching look at it, and put it in her pocket.

Coming out of the post-office, they met Donald Ruthven.

"Well, Donald," said Miss Jean, "what have you been doing with yourself?—we have not seen you for a week past."

"Just pottering through the house," said he, "for the weather has been terrible. Good-by, just now; I know the lassies are waiting dinner for ye, and I am going in for the letters. Maybe there will be one from Norman."

"Likely enough," said Miss Jean; "and, Donald, come you up to us to-night, and get your tea, and if there should be a letter from the lad in the meantime, you can tell us the news."

"All right, Jean, I'll be up; tell Dulcie to make potato scones to me." And as he said this, he disappeared into the post-office, and Miss Jean said, "Now, Harold, that is your way and this is ours, and we will be real glad to see you to-night if you will come up and meet Donald."

"I shall be delighted to come. Ask Miss Dulcie to make enough potato scones for me too."

"No fear of her! There will be plenty; and in the meantime, good-by."

Together Miss Jean and Miss Bell passed on, with a nod or a word to every one they met on the road. The usual thing was to say as you passed, "A soft day." This often struck Harold Pierrepont as odd; and he used to wonder what people in England would think if you just shook your head slightly as you passed, and said "soft."

The sisters had not proceeded far when Miss Bell said, "Jean, who in the name of wonder will your letter be from?"

"How should I say?" said Miss Jean.

"Why don't you look at it again?"

"Because I have enough to do to keep myself together in this wind without trying to read letters."

And then they struggled on until they came under the shadow of the wood, where there was comparative shelter, and Miss Bell took breath, and then said again, "I can't think who that letter can be from!"

"I don't suppose you can," said Miss Jean. Then coming to a full stop, she added, "Great patience; thon strange letter has brought us ill luck already. I have forgotten to order the eggs and apples we were requiring. I suppose I must just walk that length back again;" and she looked from the house up among the trees back

along the road they had come on the other side of the Druid stone.

"Tuts, Jean, don't be thinking of such a thing ! Barbara or one of the girls will run that length after the dinner."

Miss Jean yielded, but was very provoked with her forgetfulness ; it was something so unusual in her. "It is all thon letter," she said to herself ; "what in the name of wonder will it be?"

In the porch the two girls were waiting for the first sight of their aunts. Not that this was any proof of affection ; the aunts knew well enough they were impatient to hear if there were any letters for them.

No sooner did they appear, than Ruby and Dulcie flew down the drive, their long hair swinging after them, and blown about their heads and faces by the wind.

"Any letters, aunties : any letters?" they called out as they ran.

"Nothing for either of you ; so you can just go back as quickly as you came," said Auntie Jean.

"No letters for anybody !" said Dulcie.

"Auntie Jean has a letter," said Miss Bell.

"Have you, auntie ?—who is it from?" inquired Ruby.

"How can I tell you when I don't know myself?"

"Don't know, auntie?" said Ruby.

"No ; it is a strange foreign letter."

"A foreign letter, auntie !"

"Then Dulcie said, "Haven't you opened it yet, auntie?"

"No."

"Well, I never heard of such a thing," said Dulcie.

"Why, I couldn't have walked all that way with that thing in my pocket ; it would have burnt holes like—like Mr. Pierrepont's pipes. Are you *sure* you don't know, auntie ?—it must be from somebody."

"Great patience, lassie ! Can you not leave me alone about this weary letter ? surely to goodness it will be from somebody."

Auntie Jean disappointed them all. Instead of reading the letter as soon as she entered the house, she unlaced

and took off her stout boots, and turned them, soles uppermost, in the kitchen. Then she told Barbara to "bring ben" the dinner ; and lastly, she went upstairs to take off her bonnet and shawl.

"I wish," said Dulcie, "I knew how the London thieves manage to cut off people's pockets without the owners knowing anything about it. Ruby, my dear child, don't look up the stairs where you saw the last bit of Auntie Jean's dress disappear : you should never be curious or inquisitive."

Dinner was waiting in the wee parlour ; and the others were all in the room when Miss Jean made her appearance. She said nothing about the letter ; but Barbara had no sooner left the room, than Dulcie, who could not contain herself for one more minute, said—

"Auntie, tell us about the strange letter."

"It is from a Mrs. Ingram"—Dulcie's cheeks turned a brilliant red—"the mother, it seems, of the poor young man we had here a fortnight ago. She writes a very pleasant, polite letter to thank us for taking him in here. She says he is such an invalid, and that he is, as I suspected, only just recovering from a serious illness."

"Have you the letter in your pocket, auntie ?"

"No ; it's up-stairs."

"Can I get it ?"

"There is no hurry ; you will see it by-and-by."

Dinner was no sooner ended than Miss Jean said, "Girls, I want you to go down to the village to get eggs and apples, and you must go at once, or there will not be time."

"Very well, auntie," said Dulcie ; "we will go, but show us the letter first." She bent her head close to Miss Jean's, and said this coaxingly.

"I'll do nothing of the kind," said Miss Jean. "Get away, I can't be bothered with you ; there is no hurry, you'll see the letter when you come back. Make haste and go, Donald Ruthven and Harold Pierrepont are coming to tea, and Donald wants you to make potato scones to him."

Dulcie knew it was useless to try for that letter any

more just now, so she turned to Ruby and said, "Young woman, make haste ; don't be staring at me like that."

As soon as the wee parlour door was shut, and the girls were on the stairs, Dulcie said demurely, in broad Scotch, "Is oor auntie no a wonderfu' wuman ;" then she gave her sister a sudden push, saying, "Ruby, if you don't make haste all you know—I'll eat you !"

CHAPTER XIV.

ALICE'S LETTER ARRIVES.

"I SHAN'T stop to lace all the holes of my boots," said Ruby, whilst they were dressing.

"All the holes ! My dear child, I have only done about two and a half on my boots," said Dulcie. "If Auntie Jean intends to have any more of these exciting letters, and to send us out before we are allowed to see them, I'll follow Auntie Bell's example, and take to goloshes. We will put on our great rough jackets, because of the wind."

Toilettes completed, they rushed off down the hill, carrying between them the creaky basket, which had a tendency to give way at the handles and cause trouble just when it was most inconvenient. Auntie Jean made a virtue of seeing that this basket was used. She did not use it herself, but she made the girls use it, for she said she did not like to see good things thrown on one side.

They rather enjoyed than otherwise the fight with the wind ; they laughed at each other, at the funny figures they looked, blown out of all likeness to human beings, as Dulcie said ; while Ruby suggested that Dulcie would up like a chrysalis in the wind ; and, finally, they ill-used the creaky basket. It was lucky that Auntie Jean was not there to see it, or she would have said that it was no wonder that the basket creaked, and was weak about the handles.

Eggs and apples were collected, and before turning homewards, the girls stood for a few minutes watching the

waves breaking on to the shore before the doors of the cottages. Along the rocks towards the quay the waves were seething and breaking with a great commotion, as if angry with the impediments that broke their long roll ; now and then the bigger waves crashed against some rock, and then away up into the air ever so high went the white foam, sending fountains of spray far and wide ; and, over all, an inky, lowering sky. Over their heads, between them and the sky, flew armies of crows, in thousands and thousands ; the wilder the wind blew the more madly the crows swooped and soared about in the storm, from one side of the bay to the other, backwards and forwards, their hoarse shrieks mingling with the winds and waves. The whole of that beautiful bay, which so often looked the very ideal of peace and rest, was given over to turmoil and passion.

"Even Mr. Pierrepont could not paint that," said Ruby. "He might make a beautiful picture of some bit of it, but he could not give all that waste of sea, earth and sky, the far distance and near foreground, the myriad black birds and the racing clouds ; and the reality of the storm would be missed if one of these elements were not there."

"Ah then, Ruby, how can you take to art, when it must be so unsatisfying even after the uttermost lengths to which it can go are reached?"

"It is not painting alone that is imperfect ; it is the same with music and literature ; the end of every one of them is to get as fair a copy of nature as we can manage ; and, on the other hand, nature, as we find it originally, is improved by art."

"That I do not believe. Why, take your own argument just now about Mr. Pierrepont. You said it was impossible for him to give you on canvas any idea of the reality of the storm. Now, look over the bay, and all round, there is wild weather written on every object, even to the closed houses in the village."

"Well, you could not take all that bay, and hang it up on the walls of the room, to remind you, years and years afterwards, how nature looked this day. So art is

a right good thing, and in a small space an artist can give you a very good idea of what he saw. Now, suppose an artist was going to make a picture of our favourite 'Fairies' Glen,' and he sat himself down and painted just what he saw, a bit of the old broken road coming down to the burn; but the burn turns there amongst the trees. Well, the picture would be all one colour, and would want relief; but if he were to look behind those trees, he would see the burn rippling along amongst the stones, and catching light from the sky, and reflections from the ferns and grasses. Well, he would be very stupid if he didn't clear those bushes away in imagination, and paint what was behind them, and then his picture would have light, and it would be art."

"Yes, and nature too," said Dulcie.

"And in telling a tale it will not do to put down facts as they happened, as if you were writing a police report. It must be nicely told, or no one will care to hear it. Then suppose you are lying listening to a waterfall or a trickling burn; they each turn to a melody in your head, only the melody continues without change or variation; but if you go higher up by the waterfall you will hear another melody; if you can put them together it is agreeable, and that is art."

"With nature, again," said Dulcie. "For art, I agree with you, you must go hand in hand with nature; but you can take nature alone, and without any art, and it is perfect from end to end."

"Yes, while you have it, but you want to remember it after it has changed."

"All right, only if you feel inclined to argue, never mind me, for I am going home."

"Oh! there is the rain," said Ruby, becoming again aware of the matter-of-fact side of nature and things in general.

"Come away then, fast, and catch hold of one of the handles of this wonderful basket, and be so good as to remember that the handle will come clean out if you sneeze or look crookedly at it, and the apples will roll all over the place, and the eggs will all go in one horrible

smash, and I shall walk on, and pretend I do not belong to you !”

Many heads looked out at them to smile a greeting as they passed running through the village, for they were known and loved in every little home in the place.

“What are you laughing at?” inquired Ruby, as they stopped breathlessly in their run, and walked more quietly along the road.

“I was only just thinking how absurd we must have appeared, standing there looking over the sea in such a gale of wind, and the eyes of the whole village on us. And then, you know,” she added confidentially, “I never can think of anything in particular when I am being blown about so ridiculously.”

“I wish the rain would not drive into one’s eyes in this manner,” said Ruby; “it is so disagreeable. Did you ever know such great heavy drops?”

And in another few moments the rain was coming down in torrents from the storm-cloud above their heads. Umbrellas would have been utterly useless, but they regretted that they had not brought their mackintoshes with them. When they came to the wood, they climbed over the old wall, and took refuge under the fir trees, and waited and waited; but evidently there was going to be no change in the weather; wind and rain were to be the order of that day.

“It is of no use our waiting here,” said Ruby; “we may as well face the weather and get home as fast as we can. Time is going on, and you have the scones to make, and we cannot be much more wet than we are. There is a little shelter over our heads, but we are sitting almost in water. Look here,” and she took up a handful of moss and squeezed the water out of it.

“Come away, then. I don’t mind any amount of rain, and I don’t think our clothes will spoil, do you?” and she held out a bit of the old rough jacket towards Ruby, and laughed.

“Oh no, we shall not hurt; we are used to getting thoroughly wet,” said Ruby; “but oh, Dulcie, do take care; you gave the basket such a frightful swing.”

"The fact is," said Dulcie, "I suddenly remembered the letter at home, and I felt in a hurry."

They scarcely opened their lips again until they were in the porch at home, by which time they looked as pitiable little objects as could well be seen, blown out of temper by the wind, as Dulcie said, and the rain pouring from their hats down their faces, their very eyelashes glued together by the wet. This spectacle brought both aunts to the door, and for the next few minutes they all spoke at the same time; and then Barbara came and joined them, and, finding what was going on, she began to talk too.

The wet garments were got rid of, one by one, beside the kitchen fire, and Dulcie no sooner found herself "restored to her right mind and senses," as she called it, than she demanded a sight of the foreign letter, saying that if anybody ever deserved anything, she deserved that letter.

And Auntie Jean gave her the letter, which she read sitting on the hearth-rug, with Ruby looking over her shoulder. She turned over the page without having the politeness to ask Ruby if she were ready for it to be turned over.

She had just read the last words when Ruby gave a sudden sneeze.

"Rude child!" said Dulcie, "you sneezed just past my ear, and frightened Adam. Look at him."

"Isn't it a real nice letter?" said Auntie Bell.

"Very," said Ruby.

"His mother seems to wish him to come and stay near us," said Auntie Jean; "and I wish he would, it would be pleasant company both for him and for us, and for Harold too. Harold intends to spend the winter here; but likely enough she will write to him about it. Ruby, is that you sneezing again? you've caught cold now; that comes of being so daft-like as to go out without a mac-kintosh on such a day as this."

"Well, auntie, it is time I was making the scones," said Duncie, rising.

In the kitchen she found a tempting-looking plateful

of soda scones, made that afternoon by Auntie Jean; and at the last possible moment Barbara was to make the drop scones, so that they might be hot and fresh; but the potato scones were always left to Dulcie. It had long ago been agreed among them that no hand in the house could finish them with the perfection of hers.

It was Donald Ruthven who had first found out this, and potato scones were his especial weakness, so that, if we are to believe the old saying that "men make gods of their stomachs," this was probably the reason that Dulcie was his favourite in the house. Be that as it may, it was an undoubted fact, and every one was well aware of it, none more so than Dulcie herself; and she was just as fond of the old man as he was of her.

It was late before the scones were finished, and Dulcie rushed up-stairs to make herself grand before the visitors arrived. Ruby was already doing her hair, but Dulcie soon turned her away from the dressing-table, saying, "My turn now, you've had the glass the whole afternoon; besides, it is awfully late; they will be here in a minute, and I want to look very nice when they do come."

"Harold Pierrepont," thought Ruby.

Before they were down-stairs the two gentlemen had come in, regardless of wind and rain; Donald Ruthven, cased all over in mackintosh, which made him impervious to any amount of "coorse wather," and which he proceeded to peel off as soon as he entered the porch. Harold Pierrepont appeared in a huge Inverness cape of ferocious thickness and warranted waterproof; his brigand hat was pulled down over his eyes, and the brim was full of water; and he followed Donald Ruthven up the hill, dripping like a water-dog as he went.

By the time the girls came down, the kitchen was full of wet things hanging up to dry, and in the big parlour there was the small party sitting in a wide circle round the fire. Dulcie rushed up to Donald Ruthven and gave him a good hugging.

"Uncle Donald," she said, "didn't the rain wash you

away and the wind blow you off your feet, before you got here to be hugged?"

"And, if it had washed me away, d'ye think I wouldna have come back to see my wee lassie?"

Harold Pierrepont was so taken up by this scene, and so amused in watching it, that he at first forgot to shake hands with Ruby.

"How do you do, Mr. Pierrepont?" said Dulcie, at length. "I am so glad to see you, not only because it is such soft weather and we want amusing, but we have not seen you t^o speak to for three or four days. It is not the best of weather for sketching, is it? I suppose you are obliged to give it up and do as Ruby does, argue about art."

"No," said he, "I have not yet come down to being able to argue on art. Those people who argue and talk best about art are always the worst painters."

"Tea is served in the wee parlour," announced Barbara at the door, "and will ye be pleased to make haste, for the scones is fine and hot."

And they all rose, and Miss Bell turned down one of the lamps, and Miss Jean carried the other in her hand into the wee parlour. In the passage Barbara was waiting. She caught hold of Dulcie as she passed, and whispered loudly, "The twa pertekler potato scones ye meant for Uncle Donald are put doon at the verra bottom of the whole gathering, mind you that. I kent fine that the ladies would get served first."

"That's fine, Barbara!"

"What is that about me?" said Mr. Ruthven.

"Uncle, don't you be inquisitive, or something dreadful will happen to you. Inquisitiveness, otherwise curiosity," said she, "is supposed to be a woman's privilege; and as you men are always in such a dreadful state of mind about our encroaching on your privileges, I am not going to let you come playing 'Tom Tiddler's ground' on ours. Now sit down, uncle dear, here close by me, and I'll take ever such care of you."

And there, sitting in the dear wee parlour, over their

cosy tea and potato scones, we will leave them for a short time, and take a journey over to Shiskin.

Shiskin was particularly dreary in the rain. The mountains are not so fine as at Brodick, therefore you miss there the occasional grand effects which come between showers. Moreover, Maurice Ingram's lodging was not a lively place, although not bad in its way.

To say that his enthusiasm for sketching and for painting the sketches into pictures at home had not abated, would be untrue, during this fortnight of "coarse wather." His enthusiasm for everything had considerably abated. At first, when the bad weather set in, he made up his mind to make the best of it; and he amused himself as best he might in the house; he painted a little, smoked a great deal, read some novels, and answered a good many letters which ought to have been answered long ago; and then he took to asking himself what on earth he was going to do next. He talked to the people of the house, and then got tired of this; then he would go to bed ridiculously early, hoping to goodness that the next day intended to be fine.

The first thing in the morning he would be awoke by the rain pattering dismally on his horrid little window, just as it had done yesterday and the day before, and so on.

"I say, hang all this, you know; a fellow can't stand more than he can of this kind of thing," he said, sitting up in bed and listening. It was a sound like myriads of pins tapping at the window. "I'll either go out to-day, or I'll cut my throat. Come, leave off that noise, can't you?" and he flung a pillow up at the skylight—not that it was so very high either. It produced no effect above and beyond bending lower the looking-glass, and showing him a mop of hair standing on end, and a sort of silly, half-awake look in his eyes reflected therein.

"Upon my word I can't stand this," said he again; and he picked up his boot, nearly capsizing himself out of bed in so doing, and pitched this too up at the miserable little window.

The boot fell to the ground, and the window remained intact.

"Might have known that that beast of a window wouldn't let me have the satisfaction of seeing it break; the brute is not like any other window."

That day he braved the weather, and trudged and slopped about in different directions; and, if there be any satisfaction in getting thoroughly wet, he assuredly had that satisfaction.

The next day he heard of an old woman who was delighted to get any one to read the Bible to her; and thinking this might be an excitement, he walked three miles each way in the wet to do this. "I wonder," thought he, "what the old girl would say if she knew I am a Catholic. What a lark it would be to tell her! only I should first observe whether there were tongs and poker in the room."

The second day of his visit to the old woman he tired of the concern, and coming home, he seated himself on a bridge and said aloud, "I shall be off to Brodick."

And then he carried on the following conversation with himself:—

"Mustn't."

"Mustn't! hang it, why not?"

"Dulcie."

"Well, she certainly has the very loveliest eyes that ever looked out of mortal head."

"Alice!"

"Alice."

"Hang everything! this weather is enough to make any fellow desperate. It's no use trying to disguise matters. I must see Dulcie; I can't wait a bit longer. Jolly little Dulcie, with her pretty ways and glorious eyes! Come, while I am about it, I may as well speak out. I don't care twopence for Alice, and I am madly in love with Dulcie."

"You are a nice young man!"

"Well, I will get home to dinner (such as it is!)"

On the way home he bethought himself of calling

at the post-office to inquire if there were any letters for him.

"Three letters and two newspapers! How long have these been here?" he inquired.

"Weel, sir, it was that coorse wather that the boat couldna cross for two days, and these came yesterday for ye, sir."

"And if I had not asked for them, just now, how long would they have been here?"

"Weel, sir, I'm sure *I* canna say."

"Hullo, here is a letter from Alice," said Maurice Ingram, tearing it hastily open.

"MY DEAR MAURICE,—Mother has just received your letter, and has been made very anxious by its contents; your account of your adventure alone on the hills, and your loneliness at Shiskin. You mention the kindness of your new friends, and we all feel very grateful to them; and mother wishes you would go and stay near them, and have the benefit of their friendship and the painter's advice.

"Love from

"ALICE."

"By jingo! Alice's writing! Alice's own words! Wants me to go and stay near them! Well, she is a very odd girl, and I always thought her so. Hem! if they all wish it so much, I must go; but, as far as I am concerned, I am doing very well here in the rain; and if they hadn't mentioned it, I should never have thought of such a thing as going over to Brodick—never!"

That evening he packed up his belongings. The next morning he paid his bills, and quite soon after breakfast he was in a car journeying over to Brodick.

The wind had somewhat abated, but the rain was still pouring steadily, which it continued to do all the way up the hill and all the way down the hill on the other side. And while the old horse went trot, trot, and the little car jiggited over the stones, and the rain battered in his face, there was a set, earnest expression there; and every sound that he heard seemed to him to be a melody, to which he set the words, "Alice bids me go."

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE WIND AND THE RAIN.

THE day after the tea-party, Auntie Jean woke up in the morning with a sensation that everything and everybody was wrong, and that she must try and set things right. It may have been the long-continued bad weather; Auntie Jean, like every one else, was tired of it; and as it is the last feather that breaks the camel's back, she probably felt that she could not stand it any longer.

She happened to awaken early, so she rang the bell vigorously for Barbara to get up; then she heard the rain beating against her window, and said to herself, "There will be no going out to-day, so we will have a good day's work in-doors; there are so many things to be done, that it will be a good thing to get them finished."

So she arose and dressed; she always dressed very quickly; then she went down-stairs. Barbara, unfortunate Barbara! had not yet made her first appearance in the kitchen.

Miss Jean took up the poker and raked out the lower part of the kitchen fire, shutting her lips tightly together as she did so, and then cracked the great coal which had been smouldering all night. In the North, the kitchen fire is always, by this means, kept alight many hours. In a few minutes the fire blazed brightly; then Miss Jean, with her lips more tightly closed than ever, took up the huge black kettle with a vigorous jerk, and carried it outside the back door to the pump, where she filled it by putting it on the ground, and pumping the water into it; then she carried it back and placed it on the kitchen fire; and whilst she was so doing Barbara appeared, very untidy and very sleepy.

Miss Jean proceeded with her work of arranging the kettle without taking any notice of her, when Barbara began:—

"Is this you, mem? Is anything wrang? Can I no do anything?"

"Can ye no do anything! Surely ye're daft, Barbara; isn't it you that always gets the breakfast?"

"I'm afraid I am late," began Barbara.

"Late! perhaps you will look at the clock yonder." Then, catching sight of her, Miss Jean continued, "And is that the way to come down-stairs? Go you straight up to your room and dress yourself, and don't let me see you until you are fit to be seen."

Barbara disappeared; and Miss Jean, having somewhat eased her mind by giving this vent to her feelings, put on her oldest, thickest pair of boots, a very large and particularly unbecoming black mackintosh hood, and an old cloak, and sallied forth to the outbuildings, to see after "the beasts." Although there was a man living in these outbuildings, to attend to the two fields, garden, beasts, &c., Miss Jean never trusted him to his own devices. She looked after everything that he did, to see that it was done properly.

The chickens came tearing along to meet Miss Jean the moment she appeared in the distance. Her approach was always a signal for something to eat. A wretched-looking crew they were this morning, all long neck and legs as they ran, with their wet feathers clinging to them. Miss Jean was irate. Who had let the chickens out? Sandy knew well enough that Miss Jean objected to their being let out on wet mornings.

"Sandy!" cried Miss Jean; but there was no answer. She walked along the path to a place from whence she could see all over their two fields. She stood there, unmindful of the wind and the rain, and looked all round. Clearly Sandy was not there, and the cow was not out; well, that was a good thing, at all events!

She went back to the stable, and called up the foot of the ladder, "Sandy!"

"Ay!" called back Sandy. "Is anything wrang?"

"Sandy," are you still in your bed?" cried Miss Jean; "is the cow to have nothing to eat, and all the other beasts starving?"

And then Sandy's head appeared through the trap-door.

"I was up, Miss McInnes ; an' I gied the cow her fill, an' a' the other beasts got their fill tae."

"And did you go back to your bed? What did you give the cow?"

"I gied her hay and neeps."

Then Miss Jean went into the cow-stable, or the "byre," as it is called, to ascertain with her own eyes whether Sandy's words were probably true.

The cow was still munching a turnip. Evidently breakfast had been but a recent thing ; however, it was better than being forgotten altogether. Then Miss Jean, by gathering her skirts still higher, prepared herself for a visit to the pigs. She was just setting off when Sandy appeared, and certainly he was even a more untidy-looking object than Barbara had been.

Miss Jean looked at him for a minute, then said, "Sandy, how often do you wash your face?"

"Weel," said Sandy, rubbing his hand over one eye, and screwing up his face, and taking plenty of time to answer, "may be twice in the week ; whiles I do, an' whiles no. Ony way, I wash him on the Sabbath day, before I gang to the kirk."

"Do you feel more comfortable after it is washed than beforehand?"

"Weel, I'm no much mindin'."

"Well, Sandy, you must do as you please, but I think you would feel better and look better if you washed it a little oftener." And Miss Jean sallied round to the pigs, Sandy strolling after her with his hands in his pockets.

The path at the back of the byre was always muddy, slippery, and unpleasant. This morning it was worse than ever, and Miss Jean rated Sandy soundly for not having got those two cartloads of gravel up from the shore, wherewith to make the path more pleasant.

Some talk about the pigs followed, then Miss Jean returned to the house. Sandy leaning against the barn-door with his hands in his pockets, watched her go. "Thon's the cleverest woman I ken," said he, when she turned out of sight. Then he went into the byre to find his pipe, and Barbara came down to milk the cow.

In the meantime, on returning to the house, Miss Jean found that Barbara had been working wonders. The wee parlour was in the utmost order, the fire was burning cheerily, the small kettle was on the fire, and breakfast laid.

Miss Jean rang the breakfast-bell, although the breakfast was not quite ready, and she still had her big boots and hood on. However, she desired to produce a sensation up-stairs, and she did so.

Miss Bell was dressing herself with slowness and precision, as she always did. She gave a violent start at the unexpected sound of the breakfast-bell. "Mercy me ! is Jean down and ready ?" She tried to hasten her proceedings, but, as is generally the case at such times, she only retarded them.

Ruby and Dulcie were not only in bed, but asleep. They gave as great a start as Miss Bell had done. "Goodness ! there is the breakfast-bell," said Ruby, starting up.

"Listen to the rain !" said Dulcie. "What is the good of getting up on such a morning ? One ought to stop quietly in bed until it is fine weather again."

"And who would bring your breakfasts and dinners, if every one was in bed ?"

"Have them made and sent up by machinery," said Dulcie. "If people had any sense they would invent those sort of machines, instead of machines for sweeping the room and threading needles. Anybody except a grandmother can thread a needle. I say, how quickly you are getting on ! We will have a race, and see who will be ready first."

They were evidently more successful in their haste than Auntie Bell was, for they were down-stairs before her. Miss Jean had finished her breakfast, and with a bit of an old leather glove was busy mending her shoe.

Dulcie turned to Ruby and made a long face on seeing this : then said, "Good morning, Auntie Jean ; how early you are !"

"I don't think you know whether I was early or not," said Miss Jean ; "you have all taken your time this

morning. I think if I can get up in good time at my age you might be up at the same time."

"Well; auntie," said Dulcie, "do you know I think that at our age we require more sleep than you do. I remember hearing a very clever man once say——"

"Clever donkey!" said Auntie Jean. "In my time the girls would be up in the morning long before their elders; and I suppose the girls are the same now, and the elders too."

"Well, we are up before Auntie Bell," ventured Ruby. Then the girls began their breakfast; and there was a dead silence, broken by the opening of the door and Miss Bell's entrance. She glanced somewhat nervously at her sister, who was still mending her shoe in the window, and then at the two girls silently eating their breakfasts. "Good morning," she said; "I am afraid we are all late this morning."

"Speak for yourself," remarked Miss Jean, getting up from her seat and crossing the room to fetch her scissors. In the meantime, Adam, the cat, jumped up on to the chair she had just left. Miss Jean crossed the room again, looking at her scissors as she came; and she stood for one moment in the window, with her back to her seat; then she slowly sat down on it; and as she did so, her eyes fell on her sister, who had clasped her hands, raised them to her mouth, and sunk back in her chair.

But before Miss Jean could make any remark on this singular conduct, a hideous yell and a strange sensation made her spring to her feet again far quicker than she had sat down. Adam sprang to the floor; evidently he had not received any very serious damage.

"Bell, why do ye sit glowering at me there?—why didn't ye speak when you saw me sitting down on the cat? But ye were aye a poor silly thing."

"Oh, Jean! I couldna' have spoken a word. I tried; but I could not get a word out, for I saw what was going to happen."

The two girls were trying valiantly not to laugh. Dulcie was almost choking, and drinking coffee, and Ruby was

cutting a piece of toast into tiny pieces. But Miss Jean's attention was specially turned to Ruby, who was sneezing continually, and evidently preparing herself for a very severe cold.

"This all comes," said Miss Jean, "of going out on such a day as yesterday without your mackintoshes."

"I hate the mackintoshes," said Dulcie; "the rain pours off them into one's boots, and fills them with water directly."

"Not if your boots are in a proper condition," said Miss Jean. "But I suppose your boots are not; they never are. Do you know how long I have worn my present boots?—and I will be bound they are better than yours."

"Well, auntie," said Dulcie, "they are so much bigger than ours that of course there is more material to wear than in ours."

But Miss Jean was not listening; luckily for Dulcie, she had opened the door, and they heard her calling Barbara in the distance.

"Something has gone wrong; Auntie Jean is put about," said Miss Bell, as soon as they were alone.

"Never you mind, auntie," said Dulcie; "Auntie Jean has been sleeping on a bunch of nettles."

Before dinner-time came, there had been a stir in every part of the house. Barbara was in tears in the kitchen; Miss Bell was cowering over the fire in the wee parlour, with her needle in her hand, and shaking her head every now and then; Ruby was frightened, trying to follow two or three of Miss Jean's directions at the same time; and Dulcie was thoroughly out of temper. She was the only one in the house who was not in the least frightened of Miss Jean, or awed by these fits of temper; and Miss Bell and Ruby gave all their attention to keeping the peace between those two.

Every hole and corner in the house was ransacked; for Miss Jean seemed to sniff untidiness from afar off, and the girls or Barbara had enough to do to put straight the things that she turned over. It was a wearisome *morning* altogether, and they were all tired of each other

and things in general by dinner-time ; and it was shortly after this that things came to a climax. Miss Jean, on entering Dulcie's room, was attracted by the chest of drawers ; it had a certain untidy appearance ; and Miss Jean pulled open one of the drawers. Her suspicions were confirmed ; it was hopelessly untidy ; so she pulled the drawer out, and turned its contents in a heap on the floor.

Dulcie was furiously indignant ; said that that was all very well while people were school-girls ; but when that time was past, it was more than too bad ; and concluded by observing that she was not going to pick up the things again if they remained there till doomsday.

"Ruby, I forbid you to touch those things," said Miss Jean imperatively. For Ruby had taken up a handful of the queer collection of ribbons, collars, hair-pins, letters, &c., which had so profusely furnished the drawer. Ruby, like a guardian-angel over a heap of rubbish, stood by it, looking a picture of misery, and Miss Jean went out of the room.

"Ruby," said Dulcie, "there are some invisible nets amongst these things ; find me one to put my hair in, for I am going out."

"Oh, you can't go out in this fearful weather !" said Ruby.

"Well, I can't stay in the house, that is quite certain," said Dulcie ; "I would rather be blown up by the wind than Auntie Jean. You must not come out, because of your cold ; but I shall just run down and have a look at the sea. I shall enjoy it, of all things. I shall be back in time for tea ; trust me for that."

"Put on your mackintosh," said Ruby. "Shall I run and get it for you ?"

"No, thanks ; I prefer my old rough jacket. I say, don't stand looking so forlorn over that unfortunate drawerful of rubbish ; you must gradually get accustomed to the sight of it, as you will probably have to live with it for the next few years ; for I am not going to pick it up." And Dulcie, ruffled and angry, with hot cheeks, ran down-stairs and out of the house, whilst Ruby found

her way to Auntie Bell, to confide these latest woes to her sympathising ear.

Dulcie, in the meantime, ran down the road through the fir trees, undecided as to where she would go, and careless as to whither her feet should carry her. To get some distance from the house was her first thought; a good scramble, a buffet with the wind, the next. She was fond of the sea; so towards the beach she went; but before she came to the road which led there, another notion struck her; she would go along the road towards old Brodick, and along the Corrie shore, where she and Ruby and Maurice Ingram and Norman Ruthven had had that glorious walk about a fortnight before; it would be nice to think over all the particulars of that walk, and more effectually than anything else it would take her mind from the present state of home affairs.

There was the old bridge over the Glen Rosa burn, whereon she and Maurice Ingram rested. She found out, with a smile, the exact spot whereon they had sat, nay, the very stones; for there were the little bare places where she had pulled up the tiny green moss as she had talked to him, and there a little cavity whence he had pulled out a small stone and flung it down into the burn below.

She sat; and in spite of wind, rain, and bare trees, she recalled the scene ever so vividly; then a bright smile broke over her face, and she sang aloud:—

“He said, ‘Think na lang, lassie, though I gang awa’,
For I’ll come back and see thee in spite o’ them a’.”

And then with a bound, which told of youth's vitality, high hope, and joyousness, she sprang up from her seat on the old bridge, and ran off along the road as fast as she could go; nor did she stop until she was at some distance from the bridge and thoroughly out of breath. Still she kept her face away from home, and walked along, scarcely knowing what she was thinking of, until she found herself at some distance past the old Brodick quay, and turning a corner met the full strength of a *frightful gust* of wind and rain. She bent her head and

held her hat on, and turned her back on the wind until the fury had passed; then turned again to go a short distance further, when, to her surprise, she ran against some one. She looked up quickly—into the face of Maurice Ingram.

"Maurice!" was the one word that broke from her in her amaze; and the next instant she could have bitten her tongue for calling him by his Christian name. But said words cannot be unsaid, and a bright look crossed his face.

"Yes, Dulcie, I have come back," was all he said; and then he drew her hand through his arm, and they turned from the wind, and walked slowly back to old Brodick quay, without saying a word. The wind was so high that it would have been difficult to hear each other speak; but when they came to the quay he said, "Are you all alone?"

"Yes," she said.

The old quay was built in a quadrangle, and inside were some rough stone steps, leading down to the water for convenience of landing. Maurice Ingram pointed to these steps, and said, "Let us sit there, we shall be sheltered from the wind, and we can hear each other speak, and I want to hear every word that you say."

They descended a step or two, and sat down together on one of the worn old steps, the water below them rushing up to their feet, then receding with a gurgle and plash amongst the cracks and crevices of the stones—a sound that rung in Dulcie's memory for many a long year afterwards.

CHAPTER XVI.

INTO THE MIST.

"DULCIE" said Maurice Ingram, "you knew that I should come back; didn't you?"

"I thought you would," she said.

"You knew I should come; and I have come for you.

I knew that I should come to love you the first moment that I saw you. How much, I knew that evening when we sat on the bridge ; for at the same time I felt that this love was mutual. It is, perhaps, the quickest wooing that ever was, but none the worse for that ; for I take it that love—the real thing—does not take long coming. It does not come ; it is there from the first ; and my greatest desire, Dulcie, is, to have you for my wife."

He paused, and she did not answer ; her eyes were fixed on the waves, with their changeless, ceaseless movement ; and he continued, but evidently with great difficulty, "Dulcie, I must not ask you to marry me until I have told you that there are things which stand in the way ; not that they need prevent our marriage, but they are stumbling-blocks. Dulcie ! do say something !"

"What are the stumbling-blocks ?"

"I cannot tell you, Dulcie. One of them is a secret which you need never know, and I pray and trust you never may ; the other is the real stumbling-block."

"He means about his being a Catholic," thought she.

"And," he continued, "I feel that, in asking you to marry me, I may be doing a great wrong ; anyhow, I am behaving badly."

"Then," said Dulcie, "this must be the beginning and the end of it."

"That is simply impossible. It cannot, shall not be !"

"But, if it be wrong," said she, "nothing can make it right. If it were wrong for us to marry, there would be no blessing on it, and no happiness would come to us."

"Listen, Dulcie ; there is another side to it. In one way, I may be very wrong in asking you to marry me ; but for all that it may not really be so, indeed I, in my heart, think it would be worse to let things be as they are and not tell you of my love."

"You puzzle me so ! If you will not tell me what is this stumbling-block, how can I judge of the right and wrong ? And if the wrong were there, and I were to marry you, I should know of it some day, be sure of that. Maurice, there can be nothing between us."

"There can *not* be nothing between us!" he cried; "there is that between us of which I will not let go. I will cling to it like a drowning man's grasp of the rope that is to save him."

"Maurice," said Dulcie, sorrowfully, "why did you speak to me? why did you come back from over the hills? If you said those words to me while there is a reason for them to be left unsaid, you have done me a wrong, and yourself a wrong. Go back to Shiskin; no one need know that you have been here; you and I must forget all that we have said, and it is not likely we shall ever meet again."

"Dulcie," said he, very quietly, "you are talking nonsense. Ask yourself if it be possible for either of us to forget all that we have said. I know now that there would be nothing really wrong in our marrying, it is merely for the time being a semblance of wrong. Feeling this as surely as I do, many men in my place would have never even mentioned their doubt to you, and because of my honesty you wish to put an end to all the bright hopes between us."

Then a light broke over Dulcie's face. She had been doubting him. How could she have done it! And because he had in his sensitiveness felt scruples where no other man would have felt them. She was sure he would knowingly do no wrong. She would trust him, and she would tell him so.

"Judge for me, Maurice," said she, putting both hands into his, and looking up into his face. "I know nothing about these scruples of yours, and if you wish not to tell me, I do not desire to know them."

"Do you love me enough to marry me without knowing what they are?" said he.

"I love you enough to marry you if you say there is no wrong in my doing so. You say these scruples, whatever they may be, perhaps exist merely in your imagination; if so, they will fade away like the mist-clouds. If not, Maurice, they will assuredly break some day over our heads like a thunder cloud. I know nothing of what it may be, and as you do not wish to tell me, I

do not desire to hear it. I trust everything to you, and oh, Maurice, do what is right !”

And as Maurice Ingram sat by Dulcie Duncan on the old worn step of the quay, holding her hands and looking at her lovely bright face, he only felt that he loved her with all the strength of his nature, and as he never had loved, and never could love Alice, and feeling this, it would be a great wrong to Alice to marry her. For him it would be happiness, infinite, to marry Dulcie. His thoughts travelled to the Rhineland ; it must be broken to them somehow sooner or later, even if Dulcie would not have him, he would not have Alice ; and having settled this, he came back from thought to reality, the wind and the rain, the waves lapping up to their feet, and Dulcie sitting beside him and her hands in his.

“ Dulcie !” and he passed his arms round her, “ say that you will have me, and there will be nothing in the way, all stumbling-blocks shall be removed, and the only clouds mist-clouds—look up and say so, Dulcie !”

And then there were no more words said, and only the sounds of the wind and the rain and the sea.

At home, in the meantime, things had calmed down very much from the troubled state of the morning. Auntie Jean's vehement desire for tidiness had forsaken her after the turning out of the drawer in Dulcie's room, and she had subsided into placidity and stocking-knitting. Ruby had confided to Auntie Bell the history of the drawer, and Auntie Bell had shortly after stolen up-stairs, and with her own hands had collected every scrap from the floor and restored it tidily to its home, not but what this was a somewhat difficult thing to do, they were such odd-shaped, unexpected things she had to deal with. Together, she and Ruby put the room thoroughly in order, and it certainly looked all the better for it ; and by-and-by, as the short afternoon closed in, they were all three gathered in the wee parlour, and Auntie Jean said, “ Is Dulcie out ?”

“ Yes, Auntie Jean,” said Ruby, “ she went out a

while ago; she was tired of the house, and wanted to get a blow in the wind."

"She'll get plenty of that this afternoon," said Miss Jean. "I suppose she is wanting to set up a cold like yours."

"Dulcie never catches cold," said Ruby.

"That is no reason why she never should. You don't often take cold, but I've known you have very bad colds whiles and again."

"It's time she was in," said Miss Bell.

By-and-by Miss Jean looked out of the window. "It's getting dusk," she said. "I wish thon daft lassie would come in."

"It gets dark so early now," remarked Ruby, and then they worked and read on in silence, until Miss Jean took out her watch and looked at it.

"I think," she said, "that it will be better for Barbara to bring ben the kettle, it is getting on towards tea-time."

She rang the bell, and the kettle was placed on the fire, and almost immediately there was a ring at the bell.

"There she is," said Ruby and Auntie Bell at the same instant, and Ruby ran to the door of the wee parlour and opened it to see if it were Dulcie.

"No, it isn't Dulcie," they heard hersay. "I wondered what could make her ring the bell; it is Mr. Pierrepont."

Harold Pierrepont entered, and, as he usually did, he appeared to fill the wee parlour the moment he entered it.

"Here you all are, as usual," said he. "I always picture you in my mind, when I am not with you, as sitting in the wee parlour knitting stockings or reading, and the tea-things on the table, and the kettle boiling more splendidly than it ever boils anywhere else, on the fire."

"Well, Harold," said Miss Jean, "that shows you know our tea-time well," and they all laughed.

"Where's Miss Dulcie?" inquired he.

"Gone out," said Ruby.

"All by herself!" said he. "It is very rough and disagreeable weather; but you really seem to care nothing for weather—as for Miss Bell, I found her on the quay the other day, a perfect duck, wading about in the water, and caring nothing for any amount of it. By-the-by, Miss Ruby, how is your cold? Last night we all thought you were in for a thoroughly bad one."

"I am afraid, as you say, I am in for it," she said.

In the meantime Miss Bell was thinking over what Harold Pierrepont had said about her being a perfect duck on the quay in the wet. "And I dare say he thought I had splay feet," thought she. "To-morrow is boat-day again, and I'll put on my good boots whatever the weather!" she concluded.

"Oh, Mr. Pierrepont," said Ruby, "I am in such a difficulty over that little sketch—you know the one I mean—do look at it and help me, will you?"

"Most happy," said he. Then the lamp was brought in, and the sketch exhibited. "Do you know, Miss Ruby," said he, "you are astonishing your master. I see your difficulty; but as a whole this sketch is infinitely better than anything you have yet attempted; there is a certain boldness and decision of touch which pleases me very much. I am really surprised that you never knew of this talent before. What were you all about—Miss Bell, you in particular, what were you doing—to let this talent lie waste? She ought to have been at it early and late for years past, and by this time she should be master of her pencil, and know far more of her own powers than she now has any idea of."

"She was aye scrawling and scribbling with her pencil," said Miss Jean; "indeed the two of them were always happy with pencils when they were wee things, and I often said I thought they might learn to make something of it; only Dulcie was the one I always thought the best at it. But remember, Harold, I know nothing about it."

"Does Miss Dulcie really never draw?" said he.

"Well, if you will promise never to tell, I will show

you something she drew;" and Ruby ran off, and presently returned with a copy of her own sketch, the first one she had done with Harold Pierrepont, of the birch tree stretching before the little waterfall.

"Really," said Harold Pierrepont, "there seems to be a conspiracy in this family to hide your talents under a bushel. May I ask why Miss Dulcie insists on pretending that she has not the slightest talent for drawing? There is a very great deal of natural taste and feeling here," he said, looking closely and carefully at the drawing; "it is too bad to throw talents away so ruthlessly. How many would be thankful for such power! Miss Jean," he continued, "will you inform me whether you too have a natural and decided taste for drawing, like the rest of your family?"

"Hets, man!" said Miss Jean; "with so much natural taste for drawing in the family, I think it's a merciful dispensation of Providence that there is just one steady, sober mind in the family to keep the rest in order."

Harold Pierrepont laughed. "Ah, Miss Jean," he said, "I remember long ago you looked with scorn and derision on our sketching expeditions."

"Then it must have been on the artists, not on the art," said Miss Jean. "As for our Bell, here, she made herself a perfect idiot about it. The things she would take—rags, and sponges, and who knows what all. I am sure some of our friends thought her clean demented. I'll never forget in my life walking one evening with the MacWatties, and seeing Bell coming along the road home from sketching, with her things in her hands. She was walking with Mrs. Marshall; and as we came near to Bell, I thought there was something wrong with her, and when I got near enough to see, here was my lady talking so sensibly and slowly, but with a great big patch of blue paint down her nose."

The others laughed, and Miss Jean continued. "And things got worse. Bell painted all her dresses, and didn't care any more than thon kettle for her appearance; and then she made for herself a great big pinafore. Yes, Bell, it was; you need not contradict. It was just an

overgrown pinafore ; and then she got a friend in Glasgow to send her down a great white cotton umbrella, with a point to stick in the ground ; and one day, when I was gone with friends to Lamlash, didn't Bell have the impertinence to go off to her sketching through the village, past every house in the place, if you please, with her pinafore on, and the white umbrella in her hand. Ah, well ! it's all very fine to laugh ; but do you know that I heard of this over at Lamlash, and me only there an hour and a half altogether ! So you can imagine what the folks thought of it. I burned the white umbrella that night before I went to my bed."

"I am afraid that I must have set her up to the white umbrella business," said Harold Pierrepont.

"Oh, I don't doubt you ; you set her up to a good deal, and she soon left it off after you went away."

"Ah ! that is just why I find fault with her ; she ought to have kept up her sketching."

"Well, you see there was nobody for her to go out with, and she did not care to sit alone and sketch, and gradually she fell out of it ; and then—and then, by-and-by, the weans came to us from India." And Miss Jean finished with a sigh.

"Ah ! I never saw those weans," said Harold Pierrepont, "or even heard of them until the day when I saw two young ladies in red cloaks coming up the burn. I have sometimes wished that I had never left home. You see, when Minnie married and went to live in Australia, I became such a wanderer and vagabond, that I went just wherever chance and fortune took me. I lost, for the time being, friends and home. Now I find nearly all my relations are dead, some married, some left the country, and in all cases my place has been filled up, and I am nowhere wanted or necessary. Even Minnie, though she would always give me a warm welcome, she does not find me in any way necessary to her happiness. And it is natural enough ; she has her husband, as fine a fellow as ever lived, and her large family, grown-up sons and daughters, about her."

"Harold," said Miss Bell, "your place has not been

filled up with us ; there is always a warm place in all our hearts for you."

"I always liked Minnie," said Miss Jean ; "she used to come home from school sometimes with Bell, and stay at our house. Somehow, she never wrote to us, and we have often wearied to hear of her, and of you, too, Harold."

"Well, you see when a fellow is travelling about he gets out of the way of letter-writing ; and then, when there is a constant move it is difficult to know where to have your letters directed to. I dare say I have more often wearied to hear of you all, than you thought of me. Those girls' mother too," he continued. "What a wee wee fairy she was ! As I call it all to mind, it seems only yesterday that we all saw her and Duncan on board the ship. And one needs to look at those two girls for awhile before one can realise the stretch of years."

"Twenty-one years to-morrow !" said Miss Jean.

And they all re-echoed her words, and a sadness fell over them ; for poor wee Mary McInnes had been dearly loved among them.

"What in this world is keeping Dulcie ?" said Miss Jean ; "it's just utter nonsense of her being out so late as this."

"Shall I walk down the road to meet her ?" inquired Harold Pierrepont.

"Well, I do not see that that will hasten her," said Miss Jean.

A few minutes afterwards, and there was a great peal at the bell.

"There she is !" said everybody, Miss Jean adding, "What possesses her to ring the bell, and in that daft manner, too ?" and in another second Dulcie entered the room, and instead of the dripping-wet, blown-about figure they all looked up expecting to see, there was Dulcie, her hair hanging down her back, but most artistically arranged, her evening-dress and the cherry-coloured ribbons, and an unusually bright colour in her cheeks, the only evidence of her walk in the wind and rain.

"How astonished you all look !" laughed she. "Did

you think I was coming in to exhibit myself all wet and blown about? You see I have too much conceit about me for that, so I came in at the kitchen door, and first made myself presentable. How do you do, Mr. Pierrepont? Ah, Mr. Pierrepont," she continued, "it is lucky for you that you came here in the evening, instead of the morning. Do you know what would have happened to you? You would have been put tidy, whether you wished it or not," and she laughed heartily. Miss Jean did not raise her eyes from her work; nobody but Dulcie ever ventured to attack her. Accordingly she was privileged, and Dulcie continued, "Do you know, Mr. Pierrepont, Auntie Jean set her household gods in order to-day, and then she made a raid on mine, and turned a drawer full of things on to the floor. Rage isn't the word for what I felt. I vowed I wouldn't pick up the things, and fled out of the house. Fancy such proceedings from dear little, good-tempered Dulcie! Well, I went out for a run, and it did me so much good that I came home laughing at myself, and ready to pick up all the contents of the drawer—any number of drawers—and found when I got up-stairs that it was all done, cleared up and tidy, and the room looking lovely. Now I know who the good fairy is—it is our Auntie Bell. Auntie Jean, do make haste and get the tea ready, I am so ready for it, and when we are all cosy and stirring our cups, I'll tell you some news, and news is rare as fine weather just now. Mr. Pierrepont, half a farthing for your thoughts."

"Is that all you value them at?" inquired he.

"Every bit, unless they are something nice about me; then I would go as far as a halfpenny."

"What would she say if she knew?" thought he within himself, for he was just saying to himself, "But I am getting old; I must never think of her; for she is the very essence of youth."

"Now stir your tea everybody," said Dulcie. "Now, whom do you think I have seen to-day?"

"Mr. Ingram," said Ruby.

"You nasty, horrid girl! what made you guess so quickly?" said Dulcie, turning on her. "I was thinking

you would never guess, and I was going to have such fun puzzling you."

"Is he come to stay at Brodick?" inquired Miss Jean.

"Yes, auntie; he came this morning from Shiskin, and he intends remaining here all the winter. He says he is coming to call here to-morrow afternoon."

"Poor lad! I'm sure I'll be glad to see him," said Miss Jean.

And at the same time Harold Pierpoint said to himself, "This it was that made her late," and Dulcie thought, "I must not let them know that he is a Catholic."

Before they went to sleep that night Dulcie had told Ruby all about the walk, all that Maurice Ingram had said, and all that she had said, and all about everything, with one single exception; for she was proud of her lover, and admired him more than all the world, and she wanted Ruby to see him with eyes that found him perfect, without flaw. She did not tell Ruby that Maurice Ingram was a Roman Catholic.

CHAPTER XVII.

VAGUE SHADOWS.

DULCIE had told Ruby that her happiness was complete and thorough, without speck, without flaw. She had said that until this evening she had never known what the word happiness meant; and then she had talked a great deal of nonsense of one sort and another, and had exaggerated the good points of his face in the most extravagant way. She concluded by saying, "Ruby, I shall love that dear old Brodick quay, with its worn steps down to the water, for evermore. How strangely things come about! I have passed that place backwards and forwards all my life, and have never looked twice at it. How little did I ever dream how happy I should be there when my day came; and when I got up this morning how was it that I never felt a presentiment of what to-day

was to bring to me. If ever there was a matter-of-fact horrid morning, in every way, it was this, and it ended in romance and dreams of brightest happiness !

"Ruby!—oh Ruby! you mustn't go to sleep; I must have somebody to rejoice with me. Wake up again."

"No, I am not asleep," said Ruby, valiantly, and opening her eyes with a struggle.

Poor Ruby! it was not she who was in love and loved in return; it is true she knew that she was loved; but thinking that she herself did not return that love, it rendered it an unsatisfactory state of things. She was full of new ambitions and desires, alike fascinating and all-absorbing; and besides this, she had the deepest admiration and reverence for him who had awakened them in her—an admiration equally for the man, his genius, and his character.

At first she could scarcely credit that she had been mistaken in her fancy that it was for him that Dulcie had taken a liking, and she was half relieved and half disappointed. At first it was entirely relief to think that Dulcie did not stand between them; then she pondered over some high-flown notions she had been arranging in her mind. Their relative positions she had placed in this manner:—I love, or rather, deeply admire and respect this man; my sister does the same. I will be magnanimous and self-sacrificing, I will stand on one side, I will give him up to her, and then they will marry, and I shall be left free to follow out and do my utmost and best with art. I shall be perfectly happy with that, and in addition I shall have the satisfaction of remembering my magnanimity.

When Dulcie burst forth with her glorious secret, as she called it, Ruby's little ideas fell to the ground, nor did she remember them until she had experienced a relief from the weight lifted from her by hearing that Dulcie did not care two straws for Harold Pierrepont above and beyond that he was a nice dear old friend; and at this moment she knew that it had been like a sword hanging above her head, and held by ever such a slender rope, which the lightest breeze might snap in

twain ; and this breeze, in her imagination, was Dulcie's fancy—for so acutely sensitive are we where we love, that Ruby knew a great deal more of his feelings for Dulcie than even Harold Pierrepont imagined she saw.

Ruby had been at first utterly astonished, utterly unbelieving. The time had been so short ; what could they have known of each other ? when they had fallen in love with one another ? But there was no disbelieving Dulcie's sincerity, the love had come on time and tide of its own, waiting for no other, and brushing aside all obstacles that stood in its way. To the strength, depth, and breadth of her passion Dulcie awoke for the first time, perhaps, in telling Ruby about it. "Oh, Ruby, I do love him so!" she said once, with a little sigh.

And then two vague forms of jealousy awoke in Ruby : firstly, that a stranger had come among them and stolen Dulcie's love away from her ; for the rest, it was impossible to avoid some kind of jealousy, listening to the girl telling of how she loved and was loved in return.

How little we are worthy of the love which, some time or other, falls to the lot of every one of us ; we are dimly conscious of it, but not until it falls to our lot to give this love with all boundless generosity do we know the blessedness of it. The possibility of giving it is always there, always fresh and ready to spring, did time and circumstance let us know it. And it is this power which keeps our hearts from corroding with the world's wear and tear and turmoil—it rubs off rust and dust, and makes old people say that in their hearts they are young.

And Dulcie, speaking from the depths of her heart of her first love, astonished her sister even by her simple, pretty tenderness. Here was a new Dulcie, and she who had known her all her life did not know this side of her. She knew her merry, playful, mischievous, teasing, cross, affectionate in turn ; but Dulcie could be something else—she could be in love.

And Ruby fell asleep. "Ah well, let her sleep," thought Dulcie, "and I can think it all over."

Her cup of happiness was well nigh full ; a new look had settled on her face. and like a sound which echoes

on for all time, this look was a fresh experience engraved for ever there. Whatever might afterwards follow it could but be placed alongside this to tell its tale of what had been; effaced or blotted out it could never be. Like telling her beads over and over again, she recalled each circumstance that had happened whilst they were together.

Young, free, happy, loving, and together, what more could there be to desire? And yet there was a vague shadow hovering around each memory, darkening each bright vision, and the shadows gathered together and formed a cloud above her head, and she defined it to herself and knew that it was the miserable little secret that stood between them. It was hard, oh, so hard! why could not her dream, her bright golden dream, be all-perfect, all-radiant, shining like the sky at morning, blue and tender; like the sun rising surely up higher and higher to gild all things with a perfect light? She was giving her love royally, generously, without stint or selfishness, and she was met by a secret!

"Oh it is hard, hard! I will make him tell me everything, holding back nothing. Surely I have the right to know all, and to judge of the right and the wrong; for my future, my life, is concerned," she argued; then again adding, "I do believe, Maurice, I do believe what you say. You shall judge and you shall decide, and I give myself, my life, my happiness to you; and if it turns out a mistake, let it rest; I shall be happy somehow, out of knowing that he wished things so."

Then again, he had said it would be so much better for a good many reasons if he and Dulcie could keep their secret to themselves for awhile. "They won't believe us if we tell them now of our love," he had said, "they will say it is too sudden, that we know nothing of each other; but I shall remain here, and when we see more of each other it will not seem so strange."

This was, in a sense, reasonable enough, Dulcie felt; but for all that she would have liked to tell Auntie Jean and hear what she would say when she first heard it, and she would have liked to tell old Donald Ruthven, to see

whether his true, speaking face would light up with pleasure or look serious.

However, this was but a small denial, made for Maurice's sake. "Why am I so impatient in the meantime?" she thought. "All in good time, all in good time, that will come. Maurice's love is not a thing of the minute, it is to last me for my life."

The night went on, and gradually the turbulent winds calmed down, and the rain ceased, and there was a peaceful stillness, the storm which had lasted so long had died away in the night. Dulcie did not notice this, although she lay awake tossing from one side to the other. By-and-by the first light came into the room, and she knew that she had, for the first time in her life, lain awake all night; and when the light was a little broader she fell asleep.

And Maurice Ingram! how did he feel? what thoughts had he taken home with him?

He left Dulcie and returned to his lodgings, and in spite of all his arguments and all his reasons, there was a small odious voice repeating, "What have I done? what have I done?" His troth stood all but plighted to Alice, friend and companion of all the years he could remember. He had grown up with the consciousness that this was to be, some day—the day when they had arrived at man's and woman's estate, when Alice had become a Catholic; both circumstances equally certain of coming to pass unless death should step between—that Alice should become his wife. What more likely, what more certain? They had all known that for years and years, and this would remove the one obstacle to the union. And Maurice had become accustomed to the knowledge that all his family, Alice included, desired this consummation to their wishes, and being very fond of Alice, he had drifted easily and pleasantly into the understanding. There had been no great show of love on either side, and although the affair was already of some long standing, it had never brought one moment half so sweet as that time on the steps of the old Brodick quay.

In spite of all this, he felt an inward certainty that

Alice loved him, loved him dearly in spite of the small show of it that there had been ; for it was not her way to be demonstrative, it was so difficult for her to show her love, particularly where so slight a demonstration was made to her. And he now remembered that this thought used to give him pleasure, and he went home and said to himself, "What have I done?"

Like Dulcie, he said to himself, "How an unexpected circumstance can change the whole course of one's life!" But a short time ago he had scarcely known of the existence of this island. He had come here to be away from friends and relatives, away and apart from all whom he knew and who were in any way connected with his life hitherto, and among strangers he had come with steadfast determination to lead a new manner of life. He had come disgusted and disheartened with himself, knowing of his own instability, his pitiable weakness ; and sick and weary of his incapacity of fighting with his enemy, he had come to an unknown place, as a haven of refuge where he could give himself a chance.

Fate is always mysteriously working to bring about results ; and we are for ever casting about what we consider stray lines and threads ; but they gather together and silently are constructing the great strong cable that is to make or mar our happiness. And when the trial is heavy upon us, we sit and think while our eye travels along the weary length of way, and we see how all the events threw their shadows before, only we failed to comprehend them as they came.

Only yesterday ! it seemed but yesterday that he was disheartened and reckless—a straw in the wind, to be tossed whither fortune chose, engaged to be married, when he should prove himself worthy. He might yet prove worthy, and he might fail ; and he felt this latter was quite as likely, for he knew that the grasp of his enemy was strong upon him. He scarcely cared ; let things go, it would be one way or the other. The tide was strong against him, he was but a feeble swimmer. Let come what come might, he was well-nigh reckless.

But a light had broken out of the darkness, and as

suddenly as the light had come, a new life had sprung up in him, putting for the time being a new vigour in his veins, a new light in his eyes, and he realised that life, true and steadfast, was sweet ; it was sweet to live and love, and surely such love would arm him with a strong armour to fight the enemy.

And the enemy was worth fighting ; for slay him dead, and there was the prize of a bright jewel that could be his ; but only his over the body of the enemy. No wonder that he felt new strength to combat,—no wonder that he determined to fight as he never fought before.

How was the news to be broken to those in the Rhineland ? how tell them that he had again, and in another way, disappointed them ? It is difficult to write yourself down a traitor, and he knew he was that—false to Alice, false to Dulcie, and false to himself. Whom to write to ? what to say ? Alice, father, mother, Una ?—it was all the same, and impossible. Una was a child almost, and it would be like an insult to the others to tell her first. To his father he never wrote, and he knew that this would only add to the terribly long score written against him ; to his mother it would be a disappointment and a heart-break ; and if she gave him up in the eleventh hour, to whom could he turn ? Alice—what would she say ? what would she feel ? and then, and not till then, he turned his face to the wall, and was ashamed of himself.

Should he let things take their chance ? should he enter into a long engagement with Ducie, a secret one, until time and circumstance should bring it to light, and then trust to things righting themselves ? or should he marry Dulcie at once, and take those people in the Rhineland by surprise ? or should he sit down and write to them, and tell them honestly how things had come about ? All these were utterly impossible, as utterly impossible as it would be to break with Dulcie, or ever leave off loving her.

His self-torment increased and took a firm hold of him, till he writhed and grovelled in its grasp, and he

knew that he would act as the impulse of the moment led him ; and he pitied himself, and he pitied Dulcie, and he pitied Alice.

Then, in his injustice, he turned upon Alice. " Why did she urge me to return to Brodick ? If she had cared for me, she would not have thrown me into the way of temptation ; and yet of course she couldn't know, poor Alice ! How strangely things come about. To think that she of all people should write that letter ! What could have made them wish me to be near the McInneses ? " At any rate, he bethought himself, he had not been long about carrying out their desire : and, finally, he tried to persuade himself that he should never have come to Brodick but for that letter. Yet he was asleep long before the first light had come into the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

" HIS HONOUR ROOTED IN DISHONOUR, STOOD."

It was after this that the days settled down into the regular routine that lasted throughout the winter ; for winter came on apace and was early that year.

Miss Jean and Miss Bell were assiduous as ever in their household duties, and the two girls played at helping them ; but in reality Miss Jean liked far better to have everything in her own hands, and only imposed certain tasks on the girls which she thought it for their good to do. The two girls were happy and busy as possible, both had their own particular interests and excitements. Ruby was getting on capitally with her drawing, and Dulcie was as happy as the day was long in her lover.

It is true that the brightness of this happiness was somewhat marred by its continual secrecy, and by that unknown obstacle : but although these sometimes cried aloud to her, their voices were well-nigh drowned.

Donald Ruthven would often appear about tea-time, and gladden every one with his honest, bright, healthy, happy face ; and on post-days, sure as the day came

round, the old man would be waiting at the door until the letters were "sorted," looking out for one from Norman; and the letters came often enough. Norman was getting on, had placed his foot on a higher step of the ladder, and he wrote home and told his father about it, and the old man was cheered and happy; and after every letter that arrived he would find his way up to Miss Jean to read her the news; for he felt that his joy was not complete until she had rejoiced with him. For the two just suited one another; they were both so true, so simply honest, so straightforward in their speech, and withal so warm-hearted; they had stood by one another and comforted each other in trials and sorrow, and when joy came they shared it together.

"Ay, Donald," she said, on hearing of Norman's promotion, small though it was, "thou lad will get on and be at the top of the tree yet, and we shall all be proud of him. He has a far better head for business than ye ever had, Donald!"

How Miss Jean knew this would be difficult to say; but Donald Ruthven admitted it as a fact, as he did all that Jean said.

The two gentlemen, Harold Pierrepont and Maurice Ingram, were settled in lodgings in the village, and most days they each went out sketching, but somehow they seemed to act on the principle "I go my way, and let he go hisn." Their lodgings were at opposite ends of the village, and they seldom or never went sketching together, and as for showing each other their work, that was a thing never done unless at the particular desire of the ladies. So much for the advice from the painter, which Mrs. Ingram was so anxious to secure for her son, and by which he was "so desirous of benefiting."

The Ingram family still continued in Germany, and had no intention of returning to England for many months. The letters that Maurice wrote to them were few and far between, and at length it was openly remarked amongst the Ingrams that Maurice had not written to Alice once during the last two months. It was Una who first remarked it, and then her mother took up the subject

and wondered over it. Alice never said one word about it, and when any one spoke of it to her, she would make some trifling careless excuse for him, as if she really cared very little about it. At length it certainly began to look strange, and Mrs. Ingram wrote a letter to Maurice, asking him why he had quite left off writing to Alice, and that they had all been so much astonished at it.

In reply, Maurice said that he thought they were aware of what his father had said, that he would allow of nothing in the shape of an engagement between him and Alice. This being the case, he did not feel at liberty to continue the correspondence.

This letter opened Mrs. Ingram's eyes a little to the state of things. "He wishes for some reason to break off this engagement," she thought; "but this shall not be—marriage is the one thing that will save him; it will do everything for him. It is so hard that his father should withhold his consent: but the engagement shall not be broken off. I will write and tell him so at once."

She had refrained from showing Maurice's letter to Alice, and she wrote to him one of her strongly-worded, decisive letters, which, as a school-boy, had always brought him to meek submission, and even now had not lost all their potency. She said that, from his letter, it was easily seen that he wished to put an end to the engagement which existed between himself and Alice, and although his father had forbidden the engagement, it was only until he had shown himself worthy of her, for both she and his father had long since settled that he must marry, and the sooner the better. She added that she had not shown his letter to Alice, who was already much hurt at his neglect. "And Maurice," she concluded, "there are not many girls who would have stood by you as she has done, so surely she deserves better treatment than this. I desire, therefore, that you write to her without delay or loss of time, and let me hear no more of this, or I give you up, and you may fight your own battles, and do the best you may."

This letter had a strange effect on Maurice. He cursed his ill luck, which he said followed him ceaselessly

and everywhere. Then he argued, why should he submit to be lectured like a school-boy? he wasn't going to write a letter because he was ordered to do it. Then he made up his mind to write at once to Alice, and say that if ever an engagement between them had existed it must be put an end to, as they were entirely unsuited, or because his father forbade it, or any reason that suggested itself. Then he resolved to let his mother's letter remain unanswered for a time, and follow his usual maxim, "Let things take their chance." Finally, he took up his pen and wrote a long and affectionate letter to Alice, speaking warmly of her goodness in continuing the engagement through this long weary time of waiting.

This *duty* (!) performed, he posted the letter with a sigh, calling himself the most unlucky fellow going. Then he met Dulcie, and comforted himself for being the most unlucky fellow going, by making himself particularly happy with her. And for the next few days his thoughts did not even follow the letter, he was entirely happy in the present, and for the future—"let things take their chance!"

In the meantime Mrs. Ingram had awaited with some anxiety the answer to her letter. She felt that it was rather a daring thing to do, to write such a peremptory letter to Maurice. She judged him well in thinking that if he could be induced to return to maternal government, strong words must be used; but for all that, it was just as likely that these very strong words would cause him to kick over the traces entirely, therefore, poor woman, the days that intervened between her letter and Maurice's answer were very long and anxious. She had always felt so sure that marriage would reform him, that she had looked forward to it with much anxiety and impatience. If now he should cancel his engagement, she felt that even she must give up hope in him.

"Mother," said Alice, one morning, "I have had such a delightful letter from dear Maurice—such a long one too, and such a nice one."

And every line in the girl's face, every tone of her voice, told Mrs. Ingram that things were all right, and she was

thankful to Maurice and blessed him ; then she wrote home a long letter to Father O'Brien.

The secret between Maurice and Dulcie was, they imagined, entirely their own. Ruby was the only one to whom they had entrusted it, and they knew that she would not speak of it to any one until they gave her leave to do so. But a change had come over Dulcie, and she was brighter and prettier than ever before ; no one could fail to notice it, and people began to say that Dulcie was growing far prettier than her sister. Only one person ascribed a reason for this change, and that person was Harold Pierrepont ; for, as we have said before, we are keenly sensitive where we love, and although he would scarcely acknowledge to himself that he did love Dulcie, it did not alter the fact that he was keenly sensitive where she was concerned, and he noted that the girl's eye brightened when Maurice Ingram was seen coming along the road, and that her voice changed when she spoke to him.

And the old dislike he had felt, that instinctive aversion which had come over him in that first moment, when they had found him sleeping beside the burn, returned again with redoubled force ; and with some strange instinct he felt that there was something tangible that they could lay hold of to dislike and avoid in this man, if they could only find out what it was. But he was a stranger among them, his people and his home were unknown to them, so there was nothing to be done but to wait for what was coming, and to feel that there was something strange, something wrong.

The winter went on, and Christmas was near at hand, and on the whole the weather was not bad, there were occasionally splendid days, days of frost and snow, with the brilliant sun shining and glittering on the mountains far and near, a deep blue sea, with distant little white-covered islands in the blue—Ben Lomond in the distance, and Goatfell near, all alike white with snow. And with the roads hard and white with frost, countless diamonds sparkling on the bare branches of the birch trees, and the *sun shining* over all, how they enjoyed their walks over

moor and hill, keeping, however, to roads and paths, not wandering carelessly as they did in summer time. And once or twice, in spite of bare trees and cold weather, they had most enjoyable picnic luncheons, either in the woods or caves, or even on the open moor-side, sitting on plaids thrown on to the hoar frost in the sunshine. These were very happy times to all of them, in spite of an occasional pain which fell on Harold Pierrepont.

Norman Ruthven was to come home for Christmas, and whilst they were all looking forward to his coming it was that Harold Pierrepont announced that he must leave them all for a time, and go on business to London.

They tried to persuade him to wait until Christmas and the New Year were passed, but he said that he particularly desired to see the picture-dealer with whom he was having some correspondence at once, but that in all probability the business would be settled in time for his return before Christmas Day, or, at any rate, he fully intended to be back by New Year's Day, which was a day of greater importance in Scotland than Christmas Day.

"Oh, Mr. Pierrepont!" Ruby said, "wont you stop and see Norman? he will be coming in a few days."

"Ruby," answered Auntie Jean, "you are getting as silly about some things as Auntie Bell. Men are never so fond of each other that they would stop just to get a sight of another man, and then be off, business waiting for them in the meantime. Harold," she added, "you are quite right to go; you have been about with women-folk so long that it is time you went back to the business world, or you will forget how to work, and a man who cannot do anything for himself is a contemptible object."

"I can't say I am fond of business, Miss Jean; the only work I do is to paint pictures, and my only business is to sell my pictures."

"Well, even that is better than nothing," said Miss Jean. Her ideas of art, as work, were evidently not elevated.

So Harold Pierrepont left them and went for a few short weeks to London, and they all went down to the

quay to see him off; but before he left he took an important step, at least so far as Dulcie was concerned it was an important step, and had she known of what he had done she would probably not have bidden him such an affectionate farewell on the quay, begging him to make haste and come back.

Harold Pierrepont called on Donald Ruthven; and as small things often lead to great ends, so this step of Harold Pierrepont's brought about important results.

"Come away in; come ben to the fire. I'm glad to see ye, Mr. Pierrepont," said Donald Ruthven. "I suppose you have come to say good-by to me. Well, we shall be sorry to part with ye; so will the lassies and Jean be, but ye must just make haste back to us. It is such a pity that ye will miss seeing our Norman too."

"So am I very sorry to miss him," replied Harold Pierrepont somewhat absently; "but business, you see, business must be attended to first."

"Quite so; but you artists are not much troubled with business."

"I don't know that," said Harold Pierrepont. "I think we are more troubled by business than business men are troubled by it; they like it and enjoy it; they think it fine fun fighting, and battling, and squabbling over and settling things. Now all this is agony and misery to us. Take us out of our studios, and set us down to settle a row about some picture, or anything else, and we are lost, bewildered, and at sea."

"Well, artists very seldom mix much with the world," said Donald Ruthven: "why should they?—they need only sit at home and paint their pictures."

"They have more than that to do, sir; they have to get their pictures seen and bought, and this is the reason of my journey up to London; but before I go I wanted to have a little talk with you."

It was not Harold Pierrepont's way to be nervous or shy of anybody or anything, but in this instance he felt frightfully awkward, and almost wished that he had not come or commenced this conversation, now he had begun it, and was facing his host.

"Some talk with me?—by all means," said Donald Ruthven, getting up and poking the fire, and ringing the bell. "But we'll have the whiskey here first. Which do you prefer, hot water or cold water?—cold?—quite right. Margaret, bring ben the whiskey and cold water, and marmalade. Now, Mr. Pierrepont, light you your pipe."

"Thank you, sir, I have not much time; I think I will not smoke."

"Tuts, man! don't be talking nonsense. See, there's a good pipe, and there's the tobacco, and there are the matches; what more can the heart of man desire? So now, while I am mixing the whiskey, light you your pipe like a decent man, and tell me what you've got to say."

So the pipes were lighted, and the whiskey was tasted, and both were pronounced first-rate, and Harold Pierrepont knew that he was expected to begin his story. But, in spite of toddy and pipes, he found his task no easier, and he puffed on silently for a while, then after the long pause he burst into his story.

"I want to speak to you about that fellow, Ingram," he said. "I couldn't very well say anything to Miss Jean or Miss Bell, but you are part of the family, and I think I really ought to say something before I go away. You see I go about with the girls, Ruby and Dulcie, a good deal, and that Ingram fellow is always with them. Now, to be honest, I must first tell you that I am prejudiced perhaps against him, heaven only knows why, but I have had an instinctive dislike of him from the first moment."

"Well, so have I," said Donald Ruthven, taking his pipe from his mouth and sitting upright in his arm-chair; "I don't like the fellow; I mistrust him."

"I am glad that you agree with me," continued Harold Pierrepont, "for I thought it must be partly prejudice. Well, the fact is, he is decidedly making up to one of those girls, and, of course, they are not to be sacrificed."

"Making up to one of the girls—our lassies!" said Donald Ruthven. "To which one of them?"

"To Dulcie."

"To Dulcie!—not to Dulcie! Ah well, it must be all nonsense then, for she wouldn't take up with a fellow like that. No, she's very young yet, and when she does take a fancy it will be to some one more worthy of her than this—confounded stranger."

"Mr. Ruthven, if it had only been my fancy I should not have spoken. I am sure he has taken a fancy to Dulcie, and that the fancy is mutual. I sometimes feel sure that there is a secret understanding between them." And as Harold Pierrepont proceeded he felt almost inclined to make a clean breast of it, and confess his own private feelings, which had made him so keenly alive in this matter, and which, as he had told his story, stood out before him in strong array that for the future it would be useless to attempt to ignore.

Donald Ruthven had taken his pipe out of his mouth, and was holding it in the hand that hung down beside his chair, and he rested his head on his other hand. The old man had received a blow, and there was a silence between the two men in that little room; then Donald Ruthven looked up and attempted a laugh, and said, "It surely can't be Dulcie; she's like the old Scotch song 'ow're young to marry yet.'" He looked up at Harold Pierrepont with a certain moisture in his eyes, as if half hopeful that there was yet some mistake—that it was Ruby, anybody; only not Dulcie.

But Harold Pierrepont was staring at the burning coals, and not saying a word; and over Donald Ruthven came a certainty that the desire of his life was frustrated, and that this news which Harold Pierrepont had brought him, and that, for some reason or other, grieved him sorely, was true; and he rose from his seat and walked to the window.

"There they go!" he cried suddenly, and Harold Pierrepont hastily came to the window. There were Ruby and Dulcie and Maurice Ingram walking briskly along the wintry road; the other two were talking, and, Dulcie, who was in the middle, was the only one who *looked back* at the house. She perceived Mr. Ruthven,

and, looking back over her shoulder, she smiled, nodded, and waved her hand to him, and then they gradually passed out of sight.

"Look at her, look at her pretty curly hair!—did ye ever see such sweet eyes?" And there were tears in the old man's eyes, which he did not attempt to hide, as he turned to Harold Pierrepont, and said, "You are right, I see it all, and I suppose it was to be. And that is how we lay our plans, not knowing what is ordained for us, and we maun be thankful whichever way it is. But, Mr. Pierrepont, I have had a shock. I don't mind telling ye, for ye are an honest man, and a true one; but the one thing I was living for was to see the day that married my son to thon lassie."

And then Harold Pierrepont was thankful that he had not spoken of his own feelings, which he had been so nearly led to do; and the two men took their former seats beside the fire, and Donald Ruthven, after a few minutes' pause, continued:

"When those two weans came over from India, I went with Jean and Bell to meet the ship that was to bring them home, and when we found them, bonnie wee things that made your heart sick to think that they were motherless, Dulcie came to me first, and I had her in my arms almost the whole journey home, and she learnt to say 'Uncle Donald' even before she said 'Auntie Jean'; and she twined herself into my heart, and was aye *my* lassie. And when they were wee bit things together, Ruby, and Dulcie, and Norman, I made up this plan in my head whilst they were playing about; and when they got bigger, and folks said they were so much alike that it was impossible to tell them apart, I never saw it, for to me Dulcie was aye bonnier, aye the flower. But don't be thinking I am disparaging Ruby; no! if it wasn't for Dulcie there would be no one in the wide world to compare with our Ruby; but you see there was Dulcie, and I laid out my plans, and you see I am sorely disappointed."

Harold Pierrepont was genuinely sorry for the old man, for he told his sorrow in such simple, almost child-

like fashion, that it found its way to his hearer's heart more surely than any other way would have taken it there, and he forgot for the time being his own hurt; he only felt that he could not leave the old man alone, for he was in the humour to talk things over, and to travel back to past days, and to have some one to listen to him and to sympathise with him.

So they sat and talked whilst time went on; and from that day Donald Ruthven and Harold Pierrepont were great friends.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHERE WILL IT END?

"WELL, Jean! are ye all alone?" said Donald Ruthven, appearing at the door of the wee parlour.

"Yes, they are all away," said Miss Jean. "Ruby and Dulcie went down to the quay to see Harold Pierrepont off, and Mr. Ingram was to meet them, and they were going to walk to Lamplash to try and get eggs, and Mr. Ingram is coming back here to tea with us. Bell has gone to the village about butter. What brings ye, Donald?"

There was something in Donald Ruthven's face which set Miss Jean wondering. There was something wrong, and he had come to tell her what it was; but, woman-like, she did not show him that she perceived this; she waited to let him explain himself as best he might. Unlike Harold Pierrepont, he plunged at once into his tale.

"Jean," he said, "what have we been about? We have admitted this stranger, Ingram, amongst us, almost if not quite as intimately as our old friend, Harold Pierrepont; he is out and about with them day after day."

Miss Jean was disturbed, but she would not show it. "Well, Donald?" she said, coolly.

"Well, Jean, what do young men and maidens do when they are thrown together in this way? they fall

in love with one another, even if it be through sheer idleness, sheer want of something better to do."

"If they have nothing better to do, it's the best thing they can do," said Miss Jean.

"Jean," said he, rising from his seat, and walking about, "don't be talking nonsense when things are so serious; it isn't like you. I am surprised at ye, Jean! ye should have thought of it, or Bell. Dulcie—at least, Mr. Pierrepont was saying——"

"Donald," said Miss Jean, looking up and letting her knitting fall on her lap, "what's wrong with ye? are ye out of your judgment, stalking about the room and talking trash? If ye have anything to say, sit down like a Christian and say it."

"I mean," said he, impatiently, "that this Ingram, this fellow whom we know nothing about, has fallen in love with our Dulcie, and made her fall in love with him, and we wont have this sort of thing going on without knowing more about him, and what he means by it."

"It's not true," said Miss Jean; "Mr. Ingram is a sensible lad of judgment and purpose, not one that would fall in love with a mischievous puss like Dulcie, and I think we are all making ourselves very silly about it."

"Silly or not, he has no right to make her fall in love with him. I was left guardian to those children, and I will know the rights of it."

"I would find out first, Donald, whether there is anything to know in the matter."

They were both getting somewhat warm on the subject, the first intelligence of the news had struck home, and she instantly saw the possibility of its truth; but angry with herself for not having thought of this before, and with a woman's desire for proving herself in the right, she determined to hide from him her impression that it was true.

This was the first intimation to prove to her that her girls were women, bright and lovable. This was the first love affair, unexpected until it came; but for all future ones she would be prepared and ready, and as she

recalled to her mind the girls' pretty faces, she wondered why she had not thought of this most probable result, and she was angry with herself. Where had been her eyes? where her woman's wit? And she resolved to fight Donald Ruthven for the ground, inch by inch.

"I am not the only one who sees it, Jean. Harold Pierrepont told me that he was sure that there was some understanding between them. I only wonder that with three women looking on they could not guess what was happening."

"Some understanding between them!" thought Miss Jean, "surely it will not have come that length." And she said, "Men will aye be clever, Donald, they see things that never were to see; women can only see what there is to be seen."

"You will find that I am not so far wrong, Jean."

"I have no doubt that you would be disappointed if you were; men like even a misfortune to come, to prove that they were right, and everybody else fools!"

"No, Jean, nothing would give me greater pleasure and happiness than to find myself mistaken in this fear, for Harold Pierrepont has taken the same dislike to Ingram that I have; we both mistrust him, he is not worthy of Dulcie."

"Oh ye're both very clever, I've no doubt. I never heard of a man yet that didn't 'mistrust' another man who was younger and bonnier than himself."

"Surely, Jean, you needn't have such ideas about a man of my age."

"Well, I wouldn't answer for ye," said Miss Jean. And then Donald Ruthven came within an ace of losing his temper, and the warmer he grew the cooler Miss Jean became.

"I don't know how you like the idea," he said; "but it is not pleasant to me to think of that fellow making love to our Dulcie, and not caring for her the while."

"Well, if we find that he does not care for her, it does not much signify, we can soon let her know it."

"But I believe he is in love with her, very much in love; how can he help it?"

"Well, Donald, you have evidently got a notion of something into your head, only you cannot make up your mind what it is. I do not see that you need try and make a man out a villain because he happens to be in love."

"Certainly not."

"I am glad to hear ye say that, Donald ; for I mind when ye were young what a creature ye were for falling in love. Great patience!" and she shook her head and smiled ; "how well I mind. Sometimes ye were going to die for this one ; sometimes ye were to live for that one ; now this one, now that one ; but there would be aye some one—do ye mind, Donald?"

Donald Ruthven felt that this was not the time to be reminding him of these things, and he added, "No, I mind none of them just now ; for I came here to speak of this matter," but his tone was slightly more humble.

"Well, Donald," said Miss Jean again, "now supposing this trash to be true, is there any reason why Mr. Ingram and Dulcie should not fall in love with each other? I do not want those girls to be old maids, there are enough old maids in the family as it is. Why should Dulcie not marry Mr. Ingram, always supposing he wants to have her?"

"I don't think he is worthy of her. I have a strong impression that there is something not straightforward and honest about him." He said this rather meekly, with a remembrance of Miss Jean's remark about younger, bonnier men.

"Trust him until you find that he be not trustworthy," said Miss Jean seriously ; "it is the better thing to do. Have you no other reason?"

"Yes, Jean. Do you remember lang syne what you and I used to say when they were all wee together—I mean about Dulcie and Norman?"

"And do ye keep that in mind all this while?"

"Yes, Jean," was all he said, and Miss Jean felt that by his simple words she was beaten, beaten on the ground which she had intended to fight inch by inch.

"It was a pretty plan, Donald, but a silly one. I

don't think there was ever anything of that kind between those two; the other lassie is much more suited to him."

"Which other lassie?"

"Ruby."

"I never thought of Ruby."

"I know that, Donald; you and I have both thought too much of the other one; and Ruby is just as good and just as bonnie. Go you home, Donald, and think about her."

Then Donald Ruthven returned home, and Miss Jean sat beside the fire knitting furiously, and thinking of what she had just heard to the exclusion of everything else, nor did she stir until Miss Bell appeared at the door saying, "Jean, do ye know that Barbara has not lighted the fire in the big parlour yet, and it's only half an hour to tea-time?" And for the second time that afternoon Miss Jean was angry with herself; she had neglected her duties, and the impatience and anger which she had withheld from Donald Ruthven fell on poor innocent Miss Bell.

"Oh, you're a very nice lady to be reminding me of things," she said. "What's wrong with you that you should be remembering everything that ought to be done so suddenly? Where are the girls gone? why are they not home by tea-time?"

"Don't you remember, Jean, they went over to Lam-lash to get eggs, and Mr. Ingram has gone with them."

"And who have them leave to go to Lam-lash and get eggs? I wont have Mr. Ingram going everywhere with them like this."

"I didn't give them leave, Jean."

"Oh, of course nobody gave them leave to go, and of course nobody gave them leave to fall in love with each other, and somehow they do both."

"Do they?" said Miss Bell, with her eyes wide open.

"Whom do you mean by they?"

"Ruby and Dulcie and Mr. Ingram, I suppose," said Miss Bell.

"Bell, you are a perfect fool! Listen to me. This

afternoon Donald Ruthven was here, and he tells me that Dulcie and Mr. Ingram have fallen in love with one another, and carry on so that even Harold Pierrepont sees it, and says they have a secret understanding. What have ye been about, Bell? Why didn't ye see this when ye were out and about with them, instead of letting all the men in the place see it and be talking of it? But ye wouldn't see anything if ye could help it. If the devil was dancing a hornpipe before your nose, you wouldn't make up your mind to stop him until everybody else had the St. Vitus's dance."

Miss Bell stood just inside the door, as she had come in, too much astonished at what she had heard to move, or defend herself from her sister's remarks. "Dulcie and Mr. Ingram fallen in love with one another!" she gasped at length.

"Yes; and unless you wish Barbara to hear all about it, perhaps you will shut the door and come and sit down and listen. I want to know whether you knew of this, and couldn't make up your mind whether to tell me about it or not. Oh, I ken ye fine! Bell, you are always hesitating, always undecided, and ye will be the ruin of us all some day."

"Jean, you are speaking in riddles. Is Dulcie engaged to Mr. Ingram?"

"I tell you I know nothing about it. She may be married to him for all I know. You have all thought proper to keep things from me, and if it hadn't been for Donald Ruthven, I don't know when I should have known."

"Well, this is nice—well, I am pleased at this!" began Miss Bell.

"Pleased at what?"

"Pleased that our Dulcie is engaged."

"Is she?" said Miss Jean.

"Didn't Donald say so?"

"Did he?" said Miss Jean.

"Really, Jean, it's too bad to try and puzzle me in this manner."

"I think it would be more difficult to get your brain

clear upon any one point. But listen to me. Donald says that he thinks so seriously of this, that he will not let the matter rest; and it strikes me, Bell, that we ought to have thought of the possibility of this coming to pass."

"But Dulcie is so young!"

"Nonsense, Bell; our Dulcie is nearly twenty. Just recall yourself at her age. I'm sure if ye had come across twenty men before that age, ye'd have been in love twenty times, and I think Dulcie is rather more precocious than you ever were or will be."

"Why do you always speak of things I did?" said Miss Bell, in feeble protest, "why don't you say, when 'we were young and in love?'"

"I don't think you ever heard me talk of being in love," said Miss Jean.

"Well, I never did either."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Miss Jean. "There was no need for ye to talk about it. I saw ye at it, and so did everybody that ye came across. Ye were aye the softest, silliest thing, that couldn't keep out of being in love with somebody. There never was a greater mistake than your being an old maid, Bell."

"Well, I am sure I didn't want to be one," said she, with a sigh.

"Ye should have managed things better," said Miss Jean, "and made up your mind in time. But there's a time for all things, and I'm thinking your time's forbye, Bell, so that ye will not be required to make up your mind at all now."

"I don't suppose that I shall ever marry now," said Miss Bell. "Still, as a rule, I don't see why people of older years should not marry if they are calculated to make one another happy, and older people may be just as suited to one another as younger people, though, of course, in another way."

"Guidsake, Bell, have ye not given up the notion of marrying yet! at your age! Perhaps you are going to tell me your very last, latest love affair, in case I haven't heard enough on that subject to-day. But really, Bell, I

think ye will be far better employed if ye go and tell Barbara that she has forgotten the fire in the big parlour."

But Miss Bell was not to be brought back to hum-drum common-places so suddenly as all this. Her hands were clasped, and there was a smile on her face. Her thoughts were evidently far away. To see her thus was no new experience to Miss Jean, and impatiently she threw the stocking which she was knitting into her work-basket, and unceremoniously she passed by her sister, and disappeared into the regions inhabited by Barbara.

The short winter afternoon's light had left them, and it was almost dark in the kitchen. The fire was burning cheerily, and the tea-cups were ready placed in the tea-tray, and things generally in good order, but from the toaster, which hung suspended on the bars of the stove, there rose a cloud; clearly something was burning. Miss Jean rushed to the rescue—an unfortunate piece of bread had been placed there to get pleasantly brown, but it was coal-black and smoking prodigiously.

"See that now!" said Miss Jean. "Did ever ye see the like, Barbara?"

But there was no reply, so Miss Jean took away the unfortunate piece of toast from the toaster, and made her way into the outer passage that led to the back door. The door stood open, and as she approached it she heard a sound peculiar and unmistakable. It was perhaps one of the most decided and hearty kisses that ever was heard! What Miss Jean felt would be almost impossible to describe; she peered out into the dusk.

There stood Barbara, and there stood somebody else, and there was an arm round Barbara's waist. Miss Jean retreated, and shut the door with a loud sound, and locked it, and then for the next few minutes even Miss Jean had come to her wit's end.

She had locked the kitchen door, and her hand rested on the key. "Great patience! is the whole world gone daft?" was her first thought. "Where will it end?" her next. "I'll go out of my judgment and become like Bell if this goes on," she thought.

In the meantime Miss Bell had recovered from the

pleasant shock she had received through her sister's news about Dulcie, and she prepared to return to her various small duties ; but, with a dreamy smile on her face, she was just crossing the hall when the door opened gently and softly from without, and in the dusk she saw a dark figure enter quickly and shut the door as quietly. "Mercy me !" cried Miss Bell, giving a great start.

"Dinna be feared, Miss Bell. It's just me, Barbara."

And then Miss Bell saw that it was only Barbara ; and her courage returning, she said, "What brings ye here in that daft fashion ?"

"Miss Bell," said Barbara, "it's just Jamie Munro, nae other body. I was talking to him out bye, when Miss MacInnes shut the door and lockit it ; and she's terribly fashed, I ken, by the way she shut the door, an' I'm frighted oot o' my life tae meet her. If ye will jist come and speak till her, to take her attention frae me !"

Miss Bell was the very soul of kindness. She followed Barbara into the kitchen, where Miss Jean was standing with the piece of black toast in her hand.

"Who has been doing the toast for tea to-night ?" inquired Miss Jean.

"I suppose poor Barbara couldn't help it," began Miss Bell ; "she was just speaking to Jamie Munro she was telling me."

Miss Bell was but adding fuel to the fire by her partisanship, and Miss Jean interposed in an alarming tone of voice, "Barbara, will ye go and see that the back door is locked, and bring me the key. I'm thinking ye wont require to go outside that door again to-night ; if ye do, ye can come to me for the key."

When she had disappeared, Miss Jean continued :

"Bell, I'm thinking it will be better if ye don't interfere. I've something to say to Barbara very like what I said to ye just now."

Miss Bell fled.

CHAPTER XX.

"MY FIRST LOVE LETTER."

THE hall was still dark when Miss Bell returned to it. It was unpleasant ; one was apt to "take a start," as she called it, in the dusky light, so she employed herself in lighting the hall lamp, disturbed during her operations by sounds proceeding from the kitchen. Barbara was evidently getting a sound scolding, and Miss Bell's soft heart was thoroughly melted by pity and sympathy.

The lamp was lighted and just burning properly, and Miss Bell was lifting it up to its shelf before the reflector, when the door again opened, but this time more noisily, and by an impetuous hand, admitting the sound of merry voices.

And Miss Bell's lamp and its reflector shone down on the newly-arrived party of three, who one and all looked the better for the walk over the moors to Lamlash ; there was health and colour on every cheek, and brightness in every eye.

"Auntie Bell, is that you?" said Dulcie. "There seems to be such a glare of light when one comes in out of the dark, that I feel a perfect owl, so that I cannot exactly tell whether you are Auntie Bell or Auntie Jean's big cloak that she puts on to go and visit the beasts in."

And Dulcie advanced, blinking her great soft eyes, and with her red cloak thrown back she stretched out her hands.

But Miss Bell's eyes, from long-standing habit, travelled past her to where Ruby stood beside Maurice Ingram, taking from him the basket which he was carrying.

"Oh ! Auntie Bell, come and look at what we have brought home," cried Dulcie. "We managed to get some fish. They said they should not go out any more this year, as it is far too late for fishing. They only went out to-day just for fun, because it was so fine, but they really caught a good many, and, of course, we brought

home as many as they could let us have ; and then we had such fun about putting them in the same basket with the eggs. Ruby said they would make the eggs fishy, and I said they would make the fish eggsey ; but there was nothing else to be done—no other way of carrying them. So we put some paper between them, but of course it all got sopping wet, and was no use. And, oh, auntie ! there is such a horror amongst them—such an awful creature ! his eyes are all crooked, and his mouth doesn't seem to belong to his head, and he has been kicking the whole way home, and Maurice broke two of the eggs. Ruby said it was my fault ; but the big fish jumped the basket out of his hand ; and, do you know, auntie, the fish all tumbled out on to the road, and they were all hopping about because they weren't dead. It was getting dark, and we could scarcely see to find them. Oh, it was such fun ! and we have so enjoyed ourselves !”

By this time Ruby had taken up Dulcie's story and was assisting her to tell it ; and Maurice Ingram broke in with an occasional remark, and Miss Bell, in her universal sympathy, was instantly carried away by their descriptions, and joined in with her remarks and laughter.

All at once Miss Jean stood in the midst of the group. “What is all this noise about ?” she said. “I think you had all better go and prepare for tea. It is very late.”

There was an ominous sound in her voice, but Dulcie's high spirits were still proof against that. “Oh, auntie !” she said, “do come and look at the monster. I am sure I should be afraid to eat him for fear he should bite me, even after he is cooked. Come in the kitchen and we will get a big dish and turn the fish out of the basket.”

“Nonsense,” said Miss Jean, “it is too late. Give me the basket.”

“Take care, auntie,” said Dulcie slyly ; “take great care how you handle that basket. Remember that there are eggs there as well as fish, and I should be sorry if any of them got broken after the trouble we have had with *them* across the moor all the way.”

But Miss Jean took up the basket, and pointed to the side-table, where stood candles. "Mr. Ingram," she said, "you will find brushes and soap and water in the room you slept in. Please to make haste, girls. You are very late, as usual."

Miss Bell had lighted the candles, and Ruby took one and Mr. Ingram the other, and they all went up-stairs. Miss Bell stood for a few moments uncertain in the hall. She looked first at the big parlour-door, and remembered that the bramble jam was yet to be put out; then she looked up the stairs, and was just going to run up after the girls, when Miss Jean appeared again from the kitchen door with the basket still in her hand.

"Bell," she said.

And Miss Bell again hesitated, and stood uncertain.

"Bell," said Miss Jean, "ye will be kind enough not to go and repeat to the girls all that we were saying just now; I particularly desire that you say nothing about it." And then she returned to the kitchen to examine the contents of the basket, and to hasten preparations for tea.

And Miss Bell was left standing on the stairs until Barbara passed her and came down.

Barbara had been up-stairs to take hot water to the bedrooms, and Ruby and Dulcie perceived at once that her eyes were red, and that something was the matter. Barbara was very soon wrought to tears, and tears speedily reduced her eyes to such a state of redness and swelling that they became well nigh shapeless.

"I knew there was something wrong directly I came into the house," said Dulcie.

"What can it be?" suggested Ruby.

"The beasts, or the baking," said Dulcie. "If we could only get hold of Auntie Bell we would soon find out what is the matter."

She had no sooner said these words, when a gentle tap was heard at the door, and Miss Bell entered.

"Come away in, auntie," said Dulcie, "we were just wishing for you. Shut the door, and tell us what is wrong in the house."

"Ah, I mustn't," said Miss Bell.

"Mustn't!" said Dulcie, her curiosity raised.

"No, I have just promised Jean not to tell you anything about it."

"Is it the reason that Barbara has been crying and making such a sight of herself?"

"Ah, no; that is about her love affair, not yours."

"Mine, Auntie Bell!" and Dulcie turned round, and with a hair-pin in one hand and a comb in the other, stared at her.

"Oh, dear me! I mean it is because Jamie Munro kissed you—I mean her—behind the back-door."

"Jamie Munro kiss me, Auntie Bell!"

"No, Barbara."

"Oh, I'm glad of that," said Dulcie. "I mean, I'm glad it wasn't me." But a vague suspicion came down over Dulcie that something had come to light, and that her secret was out of her hands now. And when anything was on her mind she had a fashion of attacking it boldly. "Auntie Bell," she said, "Auntie Jean and you, or somebody, have been talking about me. You see I know all about it, auntie; so just make up your mind to tell me what they have said."

"Oh dear, I wish I had not come into the room!" thought Miss Bell. "Auntie Jean will tell ye when she thinks right," she said.

The feelings that had actuated her to appear in the girls' room were vague and undefined. At the first indication of a love affair, her every sympathy and curiosity was raised; and whether it was that she expected to see a marked change in Dulcie, it is impossible to say; probably she merely came to see whether waifs and strays of further intelligence could be gleaned. But she very soon found that instead of her gaining information, it would be Dulcie who would do this, for she was in her hands and at her mercy, and those little hands were capable and determined, as she knew of old.

"Auntie Bell," and Dulcie turned round and put down her comb, for her hair was finished, hanging fluffy from the top-knot high on her head to below her waist.

"Auntie Bell, if you will not tell me what this means I will go straight and ask Auntie Jean. Has any stranger been here this afternoon?"

"No."

"Has anybody been here?"

"Yes ; but nobody particular."

"Uncle Donald has been here then?"

"Yes ; but I didn't see him, so don't ask me any questions, please Dulcie, dear. I really cannot tell you anything about it."

"But Auntie Jean told you about it afterwards, so it comes to the same thing. He talked about me, and about my 'love affairs,' you say?"

"Oh, Dulcie ! Dulcie ! I did not tell you. You know I didn't ; you guessed it yourself."

"So Uncle Donald thinks I am in love. I think it is very impertinent of him. It is very wrong of him to come and talk to Auntie Jean."

"No, it is not wrong of him, Dulcie. He is only so anxious about you."

"Anxious ! What is there to be anxious about?" said Dulcie impatiently.

"Oh, Dulcie ! don't be angry ; but really when one hears of secret understanding, it makes one anxious."

"Secret understanding, Auntie Bell ! Tell me everything at once, please."

"Oh dear ! oh dear ! I really mustn't. And I know I am—I am quite sure I am—telling you something ; and I really do not know anything. I must go, Dulcie ! listen, there is the tea-bell ringing, and I've not put the bramble jam out ! Let me go, Dulcie !"

"No, Auntie Bell," said Dulcie, forcibly holding her back. "You must not go. I will know everything they say ; tell me at once !"

Dulcie's face and voice were so determined that Miss Bell felt utterly helpless and frightened. "Dulcie, my dear lassie," she said, "I know nothing myself. Jean was frightening me a while ago, for she is terribly angry at something Donald was saying about you ; but I know nothing, I really know nothing, and I was wanting

you to tell me. Do let me go! think what Jean will say."

"Dulcie," said Ruby, interfering and unclasping her hand from Miss Bell's dress, "let Auntie Bell go. You see she knows nothing, and it will only make Auntie Jean more angry."

She suffered her hands to be unclasped, and when Miss Bell had disappeared, which she did with great delight, Dulcie turned to Ruby, and with her eyebrows going up into a point, and a line stretching across her forehead, she said, "They wont separate us—they can't make him leave off loving me."

"Never mind, dear, it will come all right," said Ruby, "only I cannot think how they have come to know of it."

But Dulcie stood motionless. At present her mind was incapable of getting over the first suggestion that had entered it, "Could they part them?"

"Do make haste, dear! Just remember the bell rang some time ago, and you are not nearly ready. What will Auntie Jean say?"

Dulcie mechanically finished her dressing, permitting Ruby to assist her, without saying one word, and then they descended the stairs together. Her courage was of the kind that rises when there is occasion for it, and boldly she went into the presence of Miss Jean.

But Miss Jean had regained her usual command over herself, was sitting at the head of her table pouring out tea, talking, laughing, and being generally agreeable. Maurice Ingram, original author of all the disturbance, laughed and rallied the girls on their tardy appearance.

Dulcie's spirits rose, and she was very soon entirely herself. Ruby was perhaps rather quieter than usual, and things generally would have, to all appearance, differed in nothing from their usual order, had it not been for Miss Bell.

It is the fashion to talk of "hair standing on end." Now, if we may apply the same term to nerves, Miss Bell's nerves were all standing on end, she was flustered, *uneasy*, and helpless, and any sudden question or move-

ment threw her into the most pitiable state of tremor. In putting one plate down on another, she clattered them together for such a time before it was adjusted in its place, that Miss Jean asked her whether she were practising ringing a bell with the plates? She smiled vacantly when anything was handed to her, and when Miss Jean asked her why she had not put out the bramble jam, she got frightened, and as Miss Jean added, "I thought ye would forget," she very nearly said, "I didn't, indeed I didn't, Jean, she guessed everything herself."

Altogether, her behaviour was silly, and it was impossible to avoid noticing it; and had any stranger been amongst them and asked to say which one of them he should guess to be in love, he would assuredly have pointed out Miss Bell at once, and said, "That is the woman."

Finally, her overwrought nerves collapsed entirely when she rose to fetch the bramble jam, for she pushed back her chair somewhat hastily, and trod on Adam, whose coat was so black that he should at least have been called "Imp;" and then it would have been hard to say who yelled in the most agonised manner, Miss Bell or the black cat.

And the evening passed on, pleasantly enough. They had music. Maurice Ingram played beautifully, and it was a treat to listen to him. His voice too was musical and good, and he sang with Ruby and Dulcie songs which they used to sing with Norman Ruthven, and the only difference was that the songs sounded twice as well as formerly.

Norman Ruthven was very little of a musician, and the glee singing with the girls had been careless and unfinished, more for the fun of all singing together than with any idea of music well performed and carefully studied. But Maurice Ingram was so good a musician that from the first the girls felt that they must do their best at the piano, or it would be unbearable to him; and with his playing accompaniments and practising carefully and strictly with them—for nothing less than perfection contented him—they attained to a far higher point with

their music than they had before ever dreamt of; they not only astonished Auntie Bell and Auntie Jean but they astonished themselves. He sent to Germany for music, which the people in the Rhineland sent to him, thinking how fortunate he was to have fallen amongst pleasant friends in his loneliness—people who could appreciate and enjoy music together.

And the quaint old Scottish songs, mostly by "author unknown," were replaced by German lieder, and the girls listened to Maurice Ingram singing "Adelaide," and thought this was the most perfect thing that could be heard; and then they began to turn over the pages of Mendelssohn, Schubert, and Schumann, and to sing them for themselves with a newly awakened pleasure in music.

"We have gone a step above Norman now, haven't we?" said Dulcie that evening. "Which shall it be? shall we have to step down again to him, or will he have to find out the way up to us?"

"Can't step back; that is impossible in any art," suggested Maurice Ingram. "If you have mounted up a step, he will have either to mount up after you or get left behind."

"You are all thinking yourselves very clever," remarked Miss Jean. "I don't see that poor Norman is so far behind you; and if he doesn't sing these German thingamys, it is because he has enough to do attending to his work, as a man should. Just trash you are making of it; not that I ever attempted to understand a word of German myself, but for all that I am sure you are making perfect fools of yourselves over the pronunciation."

Miss Jean was apt to be wrathful when she fancied Norman attacked. Dulcie, however, read over a line of the German song, saying, as she finished, "There, I am sure that is not bad, is it, Mr. Ingram?"

"Any way," said Miss Jean, "it's perfectly ridiculous. I don't mind it when we are alone, but I would not let you sing that before strangers."

Afterwards they worked whilst Maurice Ingram read *aloud* to them—Maurice Ingram, who, alone of the little

party, did not know of the storm that was brewing above their heads ; and Dulcie, who thought of this whilst he was reading, was greatly indignant. "He is more concerned than anybody," thought she, "and everybody else knows all his private affairs, and is talking them over, whilst he knows nothing of it." It did not occur to her to think that this was at least no worse than the fact of his having kept, and made Dulcie keep, such a secret from their knowledge, whilst they had never dreamt of its existence. Her first thought was for him, and whether things in general were pleasant or unpleasant for him was to her the criterion of their being good or bad.

She felt a strange shyness as to letting him know what she had learnt since she had entered the house. It was very difficult to tell him, but she determined that he should not go away that night in ignorance of everything.

After much thinking, she decided that there would be no possible opportunity that night of private conference, so she went out of the room and got a piece of paper and a pencil, and wrote down hastily a few words, then she folded her information into the smallest possible compass, and put it in her pocket.

When "good-nights" were being said, she managed to be the last to shake hands with him, and this just as he was going out at the door ; and Maurice Ingram instantly became aware that there was a something between their hands, and that it was left in his, and his hand closed tightly over it, as he went off down the hill in the dark. It was utterly impossible to read it before he reached home.

As soon as he had arrived at his lodgings he unclasped his hot hand, and there, just as she had placed it, lay the tiny message. He lighted the candle, inwardly boiling at the time it took to light, and then he unfolded the paper and read, "Maurice dear, I cannot let you remain in ignorance of what I have heard this evening—they all of them know about you and me. How they have come by the knowledge I cannot tell.—D. D."

"This is pleasant! Confound and hang them all!" thought he, and then he looked curiously at the scrap of a

note, "My first love letter" was what he then said, and aloud.

Maurice Ingram, what are you saying? What do you call all those dozens of prettily penned pleasant letters of Alice Young's?

CHAPTER XXI.

"MEN WERE DECEIVERS EVER."

MAURICE INGRAM woke up in a sulky fit the next morning, his relentless ill-luck, as he called it, followed him with a strange persistency through all and everything.

At Arran he had drifted into pleasant lines of life, and his days passed happily enough. Dulcie he loved as much as it was possible to a selfish nature to love anything. To watch her, to listen to her, to have her near him, were all intense pleasures to him, and as things had come about, he would have contentedly continued them for any length of time.

He awoke with an impression that something disagreeable was hanging over his head, and as he pondered, he knew that the pleasant manner of life he had been leading had, so to say, come to an end. "It isn't the fashion," he said to himself, "to let people be jolly. I know what they will do, they will stick one of the old ladies or the old man, or some old codger or other between us, they will never let us be alone for one moment. There is only one way out of it, and even that way is 'out of the frying-pan into the fire,' for if I announced to them that Dulcie and I were engaged, what about Alice?"

Maurice Ingram did not see his way out of it, and, true to his nature, he slunk about that day and avoided the house on the hill and its dwellers in the most cowardly fashion.

It was post-day, and they went down, a large party of them, to fetch the letters—Miss Jean, Miss Bell, Ruby,

and Dulcie. They were late, and Maurice Ingram, who had waited until he thought they would have fetched the letters and returned home, was just approaching the post when he saw the party coming out of the office. Quick as thought he turned a corner and walked hastily along a field-path, which was protected on the side nearest to the post-office by a high hedge. He could not exactly account for this strange move on his part, and whilst he was walking along the field-path, he asked himself why he had done this, but it was a difficult question to answer.

Ruby had seen him, but no other of the party. "Did you see Mr. Ingram?" she said to Dulcie. "I wonder what made him avoid us, for I am sure he saw us?"

"I did not see him," said Dulcie. "You must be mistaken, why should he avoid us?"

She said this decidedly; but still she wondered whether Ruby was right as she walked along the road towards home, for it was not likely that Ruby should have been mistaken, and the thought that he had wished to avoid them was not pleasant.

In the meantime Miss Bell, as she walked along the road, was reading a letter from an old friend of hers in Glasgow. The friendship between her and Miss Donaldson was of very long standing, and since the days when they were girls together they had exchanged confidences, and most frequently by long and crossed letters, such as the one which Miss Bell was now reading. One passage of this letter she read over once or twice. This was the passage: "I was much interested in all you tell me about the young Englishman; Dulcie's finding him asleep beside the burn was a most romantic commencement of acquaintance. I shall be most astonished if those two do not fall in love with one another; indeed, Bell, those girls are getting quite of an age to be thinking of that sort of thing. You remember what you and I were at that age; but I'm thinking girls of the present day are not half what they were in our day. Well! as I was saying about Dulcie and this young Englishman, they will be sure to fall in love with one another, if they have not already

done so ; after such a beginning, it would be a thing unheard of were such consequences *not* to follow ; but I have been thinking things over, and I would be glad if you could find out whether his mother was a Scotch-woman, and if her name was Laura Archer ; for I used long ago to know Laura Archer, before I had left school, and she married an Englishman of the name of Ingram. James Archer—you know James Archer, Bell ? Well ; he is her cousin. I should have asked him about it, only he is away on business just now, and he never speaks of her, for the family were very much put about by her marriage. I cannot help thinking that this young Englishman must be a son of Laura Archer's, for she married very young indeed, and the very night before I had your letter I was dreaming a great deal about Laura Archer, when she was a handsome-looking girl ; but I do not think you ever saw her." After this the letter wandered into other and various subjects, alike interesting to Miss Bell. But when she had finished reading the letter and had folded it up, the part which recurred oftenest to her mind was that relative to Maurice Ingram, and the possibility of his mother being the Laura Archer whom Miss Donaldson remembered long years ago. And she determined to ask Maurice Ingram if this were the case the very next time that she saw him. "Likely enough he will be up this afternoon, or to-morrow forenoon," she thought.

But Maurice Ingram did not make his appearance either that afternoon or the next forenoon, and after dinner on that day Ruby and Dulcie prepared for a walk, and Miss Bell, somewhat wondering, said, "Girls, why do you not wait a wee, Mr. Ingram will surely be coming to go with you for a walk ?"

Dulcie laughed and said, "Really, Auntie Bell, I do not see the fun of waiting Mr. Ingram's or any other gentleman's convenience ; Ruby and I will lose the best part of the afternoon, which one cannot afford during these terribly short days."

"You are quite right," said Miss Jean. "I am sure I don't know what Bell is thinking about. Why should

you be waiting for Mr. Ingram, you do just as well and better alone?"

And in another few minutes the girls were gone, Miss Bell, for a wonder, accompanying them, and Miss Jean was left alone to go round the domain and look after Sandy and the beasts, and things in general.

In the meantime Maurice Ingram was getting more and more angry with himself. He asked himself why he stopped away from them, and decided that it was all owing to that silly avoidance of them on the previous morning; after that there seemed to be a difficulty in approaching them, and by this time they must, one and all, surely have remarked on his unusual absence. That morning he had made up his mind to present himself at the usual hour that the girls walked out, and offer to accompany them; but when the hour came he lingered about until he was sure that it had passed, and that the girls must have already started, if they were going out that afternoon. The reasons he gave to himself for this conduct were vague and meaningless, and connected with Alice.

By-and-by he sauntered out, without determining to himself where he should go to, and presently he found that his feet were carrying him along the road through the fir-tree wood towards the house on the hill-side; and although he had made up his mind whilst he was walking along not to go in, he no sooner arrived at the gate than he unfastened its queer little latch and walked in.

Barbara was the only one in the house, and in answer to his inquiry, she told him that the rest were all out, but that Miss McInnes was "oot bye among the beasts. And, Mr. Ingram," she added, "if ye are going to find her, maybe ye'll carry this till her."

"Good heavens, what is that?" said he, gazing with some wonder and disgust at a most extraordinary greasy-looking collection of messes, broken and mixed up together in a large yellow dish, which Barbara invited him to take hold of.

"What is't? why the chickens' meat to be sure," and she still held it towards him.

So he took it at last, but very gingerly, and sallied round towards the outbuildings, devoutly hoping that the mixture would not pour over the sides of the yellow dish. He was so occupied with watching the dish that he did not see what was coming towards him until he heard a sort of rush, and looking up he perceived all the chickens tearing along towards him, or, as he afterwards said, armies of chickens, millions of them, coming from all directions, their long necks outstretched before them, their skinny legs outstretched behind them, and all coming at him.

They flew round him in crowds, and his progress was barred, and he wished that he had not brought their supper, for he did not know what to do with it. They began flying up to the dish; but he thought, "I know they are not fed here, but I can't get on for them." Then they began flying on to his back, and trying to walk up to his shoulders, then one great black Spanish monster landed there safely, and looked into his face. "The fiend! it has got its dirty claws on my collar now!" he suddenly cried out. "Get out you brute!" At the same moment another Spanish monster flew up to the side of the dish, and balancing there, began to eat, scattering the food over the sides as it did so, and over Maurice Ingram's hand. Endurance could go no further: "Take your mess and go to the devil with it!" he said, as with a face expressive of the utmost disgust, the yellow dish fell from his hands to the ground, where it broke to pieces, and the Spanish monsters and the other chickens, one and all struggled furiously, each one desiring to get the larger portion of its contents.

Maurice Ingram took out his handkerchief and gave his whole thought to his collar, and sleeves, and hands, which all certainly looked as though they would be the better for some attention. He was proceeding ruefully with this business, when a sound, which was clearly not chickens, made him look up. At a short distance, in a large brown cloak and the black mackintosh hood, stood Miss Jean, indulging in a hearty fit of laughter.

He paused in his work, and as he looked at her the

conviction crossed his mind that she was laughing at him. This he felt was adding insult to injury, and it did not tend to put him in better temper.

"Good morning, Miss Jean," he said, "you see I have been getting into difficulties with your poultry. What appetites they have to be sure!" and he advanced and shook hands with her.

Miss Jean was still laughing; but whilst he was shaking hands with her she perceived still remaining marks of the Spanish monster who had promenaded up his back. "Come you back to the house with me," she said, "you will be all the better for a cleaning; or stay, perhaps it will be better to wait till it is dry."

"Till what is dry?"

"The foot-marks on your back and shoulders."

"Hang them! the brutes!"

"You had better get some goloshes made for my chickens," said Miss Jean, laughing. "But will you come and see the calf; it is just a day old, and such a bonnie wee thing?"

Miss Jean then led the way to the byre and showed off with the greatest pride the creature which she called such a bonnie wee thing. To Maurice Ingram's eyes it seemed to be all legs, and a poor feeble, helpless little body, terribly embarrassed by these silly looking legs; but he, nevertheless, told Miss Jean that he admired it excessively, and that it was the finest calf he had ever seen. He said this not only because it "was his nature to" and "men were deceivers ever," but because he wished to put Miss Jean in a good temper.

But Miss Jean had always liked Maurice Ingram; and it needed no great effort on his part to put her on good terms with him; and soon they fell to chatting pleasantly on things in general, and by-and-by Miss Jean remarked, "It is astonishing what a change our good pure air has made in you. Any one seeing you as I saw you first, a month or two ago, would have thought that you had scarce a month or two to live;—but now"—and Miss Jean gave him a hearty look of approval—"every bit of you tells a different story."

"Thank you, Miss Jean," said he. "If it had not been for your kindness, I should probably have told a pitiful story by this time."

"Tuts ! I had nothing to do with it ; it was Dulcie who found you doing your best to kill yourself. The first time I clapped my eyes on you, I got quite a shock. There were the rest of them—our ones—all with the red colour in their faces, and you standing like a reed that had tried to grow taller than the others, and therefore had got hurt with the wind ; your face was just a dead white, and the black hair about it, and the great black eyes, made it look all the whiter, and my heart warmed to you, for I said to myself, 'Thon lad is ill, and alone amongst strangers, when he should be having a woman about him to care for him.'"

And then he said, "There was such a homely atmosphere about your house, I felt it from the first moment that I entered. I shall never forget the way in which you all received me—a stranger. And even coming along the moor home, Miss Dulcie was so good and thoughtful."

"Oh, she is a good-hearted wee body !" said Miss Jean.

"I should think she was ! I should think Miss Dulcie is about perfection."

"Come," said Miss Jean, "that is further than I would go about any one, and a very great deal further than I would go about Dulcie."

"A man is never a prophet in his own country, and I suppose a woman, be she little lower than the angels, is not infallible in her own house," thought he ; and aloud he said again, "I think her nothing less than perfect, and in all ways perfect ;" and then, seeing Miss Jean looking at him in some astonishment, he added, "And that is what I have come here to-day to tell you. I am glad they are all out, because I can tell you what I wish to say without interruption. I have fallen in love with Dulcie, in love as I never knew that I could love. She has the sweetest, loveliest face that ever was, and she is

true-hearted, loving, and clever, and I want you to give her to me."

Miss Jean was too astonished to speak; and he continued, after a short pause, "I know that you cannot have any possible reason why we should not marry, and I must have her."

"Marry Dulcie! is the man serious?" said Miss Jean, not addressing him particularly.

"So serious, Miss Jean, that I know that my whole happiness is at stake."

"Have you spoken to Dulcie?"

"I have. I couldn't help it—the words came out before I had had time to think about what I was doing; but you know what it is to be young and in love, and love that can stay to calculate is simply not love at all. Surely you will not think the worse of me, Miss Jean, because I have been unable to refrain from telling Dulcie that I love her?"

"And what did she say?"

"I do not remember exactly, but I know that our love for one another is mutual."

"And she kept this from me!"

"It was my fault, Miss Jean, all my fault. I was somewhat afraid of you once, I believe, but I am not so now, and I will tell you all about it. I loved Dulcie at once from the very first moment. It was to be, and it never came—it was always there; and I found out that this was mutual. I will not tell you how soon it was, or you would not understand it, and it made us so perfectly happy; and she wanted to go at once and tell Auntie Jean and Uncle Donald, only I made her promise to wait awhile before she did so. I told her that you would none of you believe in the depth of love that had come so quickly. Since then it may have increased; but I cannot any longer keep from telling you of it. Now I have told you; and do you think you could like me well enough to let Dulcie marry me?"

There was a long pause; then Miss Jean said suddenly, "She has no money!—at least, none worth mentioning."

"Hang money!" said he. "I suppose I have enough for us. We should not want to be very grand. My father allows me seven hundred a year now, and of course he would have to increase that when I marry."

"Ah! perhaps your people would not like you to marry, and they might not like Dulcie."

"Mightn't like Dulcie!—how could they help it? As for marrying, I know they are most anxious for me to marry."

"Well! there seems to be nothing in the way of it; only it is utterly impossible to give an answer to anything so serious all in a minute; it requires days and days thinking over. You see, Mr. Ingram, we are not like you people of the world; and such things as marrying and giving in marriage are not things to be done quickly and heedlessly by us. And then"—as another thought struck her—"you must ask Donald, Donald Ruthven, he is guardian to the girls, and they are not yet of age, and I know he is in no hurry to part with them."

"I will go to him at any time."

"Well, now, don't be in such a wonderful hurry. I have no doubt but that you could go to him at any time, and run all the way too; but there is not particular occasion for it. Young folks are all alike. As soon as they have got anything in their minds they can't rest until they have it in their hands; they would knock the world upside down to get it, if they could. But do you know, when one comes to think about it, the idea of Dulcie's being married and settling down to look after a house of her own, is too absurd. With Ruby it would be bad enough; but as for Dulcie!—why, you might as well take one of those chickens; they would manage the house just as well. She is careless, childish, and impatient, and likes to have her own way, and I am afraid that she has been spoilt; in fact, she is everything that a woman and a wife should not be."

"I think she is everything that a woman and a wife should be."

"Oh, if you are going to contradict every word that I say, it is simply absurd. What should you know of her?"

Why, you only saw her for the first time about two months ago, and you need be young people indeed to fall in love with one another in so short a time as that."

"That is just what makes me want to have her, Miss Jean."

"You have just got that one idea in your head," said Miss Jean laughing. "You want to have Dulcie; what would you do with her when you had got her?"

"What would I do with her?" said he, with a smile coming over his face. "I would take her away and love her."

"Ay!" said Miss Jean, the smile fading from her face as she spoke, "so ye would; I forgot that,—ye would take her away!"

CHAPTER XXII.

AT A DISADVANTAGE.

Miss JEAN and Maurice Ingram walked silently side by side towards the house. They passed round it, to the front entrance, for the door could always be entered by simply turning the handle.

As they stood in the porch about to enter, a sound at the not far distant gate made them both turn round. It was getting dark, but for all that the two watchers were not long in recognising Dulcie, Ruby, and Miss Bell, who were entering. And as they came nearer, they saw Dulcie take off her hat and throw it up in the air once or twice, and catch it as it fell, and she ended by putting the hat on Miss Bell's head, over her own, and then she ran backwards up the drive, laughing at Miss Bell's appearance.

"Look you at that now, Mr. Ingram," said Miss Jean; "is that piece of nonsense fit to be married, to settle down steadily to look after a husband and house?"

But Maurice Ingram did not answer. He placed himself just inside the porch, where he would not be so easily seen, and with somewhat of a flush on his face, he

watched Dulcie's light, free movements as she capered up the drive, unaware that she was watched by any one but Auntie Bell and Ruby.

They did not perceive Miss Jean until they were quite inside the porch, and at the same instant that they recognised her, Maurice Ingram stepped forward and deliberately took Dulcie in his arms and kissed her.

"Maurice ! Maurice !" she cried, in utter amaze, not only at his presence, but at his mode of receiving her before them all. "Maurice, what do you mean ?" she said again.

But he still held her, and merely said, "It means, Dulcie, that our secret is a secret no longer."

Miss Jean had opened the hall door, and a flood of light came out to them, and as they stepped into the house Miss Jean said, "Mind you both, you needn't make too sure of things. Donald Ruthven has not given his consent yet ; and even if he does allow it, it will be a long time before I can consent to Dulcie's being married. She will have to alter very much before she is fit for that."

This sudden and unexpected revelation of the state of things took them all, Maurice Ingram included, very much by surprise ; and they stood about the hall, alternately all talking together, and then all standing silently staring at one another. Miss Jean was, of course, the first to recover herself, and said, "If you ever intend to descend to being ordinary human beings again, I think it is time ye set about it, for I am sure ye look more daft than wise."

"Well, Auntie Bell is the worst," said Dulcie, pointing at her and laughing. Miss Bell was sitting on the third step of the stairs, holding her umbrella tightly with both hands, and with Dulcie's hat still perched on the top of her bonnet. When Dulcie called attention to her, Miss Bell, who had not once opened her lips since she came into the house, shook her head gently and sighed deeply.

And with a sudden reaction from the serious mood which had held them, Ruby, Dulcie, Maurice Ingram, and then Miss Jean, all joined in a hearty fit of laughter,

originating in Miss Bell's sigh and shake of the head, and they laughed on, as people do laugh in these paroxysms, at nothing particular, until Miss Bell herself joined in the merriment. And it was the best thing that could have happened, and did them all good, putting them at their ease again, after the thorough upsetting which they had one and all received.

"Did ye go to Uncle Donald?" said Miss Jean.

"Yes," said Dulcie; but I do not think he will come out to-night. You see, as Norman is coming home to-morrow, there are all sorts of grand preparations going on for the event. Just fancy, Auntie Jean, Uncle Donald and Margaret were helping each other to mend a hole in a carpet; it was such fun watching them! We walked into the house without their hearing us, and they were in the kitchen, and when Uncle Donald saw us, he jumped up and pretended he was not helping at all; but in a few moments he disagreed with Margaret's work, and could not help putting his hand to it again. They squabbled so over it, that I thought they would quarrel for ever. But Margaret and he understand one another so completely. I think she is as fond of Norman as any of us. Oh! and auntie, he has got such a pretty kind of little rustic frame, which he has made himself; it is a sort of double frame, and he has put in it the photographs of Ruby and me, and he has hung it up in Norman's room: it really looks quite grand. He said he could not possibly come out this evening, as there were so many things to do, and if he left everything to Margaret it would all go wrong; and Margaret said she wished he would go out, for she should never get the things done if he kept worrying her about them."

"I do not think he will come," said Ruby. "Whenever Norman is coming home, he seems to think that there is something to be done to every corner of the house, and although he has had all the time since he went away to prepare, everything seems still to be done the very day before he returns."

"Auntie Bell! are you waiting for another hat?" inquired Dulcie, laughingly, and catching Ruby's from

her head, she placed it over her own on Miss Bell's head.

"No," said Miss Bell, sighing again, and rising to her feet and knocking against Dulcie, whilst the two hats thereby fell to the ground, and the bonnet was pushed on one side; "no, Dulcie, my dear child, but I am rejoicing over your happiness;" and then she looked round to make sure that Miss Jean had quite disappeared into the wee parlour, before she added, "for there is nothing half so sweet as love in all the world; and, Maurice Ingram,"—here she took hold of his hand nervously,—"I congratulate you, dear Maurice, for ye will belong to us, when you are married to Dulcie. I hope that there will be no disappointments for you both. Be you good to her, for I am sure she will do her best. Oh, I'm real glad!" and she kissed Dulcie. "I was never engaged myself, but I know what it is, for I have been in love. I'm so glad!" and finally Miss Bell, with a hand on his shoulder, was wrought to such a pitch of enthusiasm that she made a sudden dab at his cheek with her lips.

He, however, had not the slightest idea of what was in store for him, and turned his head towards her at the same moment, and received her salute on the tip of his nose.

"All right, Miss Bell—Auntie Bell," said he. "Thanks. We shall be awfully jolly together; Dulcie and I intend to be enormously happy, and to show everybody else what happiness is, so that we shall have everybody getting married, to try and follow our example—you first and foremost, Miss Bell."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Miss Bell, with the bright sound which occasionally came into her voice. "Ha, ha! that is only for the like of you—young folks; but who knows! who knows!" and she laughed again.

Miss Jean just then crossed the hall, and instantly Miss Bell assumed a serious expression of face, and said sternly, "Ruby, I will be glad if you will give me my candlestick, and not keep me waiting here any longer," and she held out her hand in a dignified manner.

Miss Jean remarked, "Indeed I think it is time you all went about your business."

And then they separated. Miss Jean went about her occupations, thinking very seriously of what had come to pass in her household. She recalled the conversation she had so lately held with Donald Ruthven, of the dislike and mistrust which he had said he felt for this very Maurice Ingram, to whom she had, so to say, already given her consent to his marriage with Dulcie. Had she been hasty and unwise, too ready to place confidence in an utter stranger, and such confidence as should only be given to the most trustworthy, the most worthy? Why had she been so predisposed in his favour? She scorned even to suggest to herself that his good looks had ought to do with it; she only said to herself that there was an honesty in his manner, that his eyes were true and open, and this was what made them beautiful; and indeed there was all this in his face, and any woman would have endorsed Miss Jean's opinion of him. His ill-health and loneliness, as well as his most pleasing manners, had, she acknowledged to herself, at first greatly influenced her feelings towards him. And although she so much honoured Donald Ruthven's opinions, that it gave her uneasiness and disquiet to recall his words about Maurice Ingram, she nevertheless had such firm reliance on her own powers of discrimination, on her "woman's wit," that she soon became aware that if Donald Ruthven were disposed to object to the proposed match, she would take the field against him. For Maurice Ingram had somehow or other found himself a place in her heart.

Miss Jean thought over the subject, round and round it, as she stood skimming the cream from the milk, and like the Scotch ponies that come face to face with a hill and directly start on with fresh vigour and determination, impatient to master it, she longed to come face to face with Donald Ruthven to know how the land lay, and to master any difficulties, if difficulties should gather about the pathway.

As she passed through the kitchen, Maurice Ingram was standing by the fire whilst Barbara was brushing

away the footmarks of the Spanish monster. Miss Jean passed on with her jug of cream, without saying a word, into the wee parlour, where tea was laid out on the table.

Some one was sitting beside the fire. She looked up astonished ; it was Donald Ruthven.

"Donald, are ye there?" she said.

"Ay," he said, "how are ye, Jean?"

"Weel enough."

Miss Jean then set down the cream-jug, Scotch fashion, in the slop basin, and turning her back on her visitor she busied herself about the table, turning over in her own mind the possibility of having some talk with him before any of the others came in to disturb them. Her hesitation was, however, almost immediately put to flight by the opening of the door. She looked up, it was Miss Bell!

"Bell is an unlucky body, always turning up whenever she is not wanted," thought her sister.

Miss Bell started with pleasure when she saw Mr. Ruthven. "Well, Donald," she said, "so ye managed to come after all," and she stepped briskly up to the fire beside him. Miss Bell was flushed. Miss Bell was excited, and determined to show that she had every right to be very pleased indeed about something. She had put on her best cap, a gorgeous construction which had been bought ready made in Glasgow, and which she could never be brought to believe sat straight on her head; when it was straight, she declared that it felt crooked, and when she thought that she was unobserved, she would give it little furtive pulls. She would continue this until she had got it what she called comfortable; but by the time that it arrived at this point, her appearance was decidedly rakish.

Any idea of secrecy was foreign and impossible to her, and anxious to gossip over her news with Mr. Ruthven, and uncertain how to begin, she at length said, "What a time this has been! mercy me, but we will have plenty to think about for many a long day after this!"

"What's wrong?" inquired Mr. Ruthven.

"Wrong!" said Miss Bell, waving her hand, whilst a

smile broke on her face. But Miss Jean hastily interposed with, "Tuts, Bell, will ye never be wise?" She was as anxious as Miss Bell was, to tell Donald Ruthven all that had happened; only she wished to tell him herself. "Bell would make the cleverest man in Christendom appear a fool if she had the describing him," she thought; and, with some impatience and anger, she asked herself what she should say. Again she was saved the trouble, for the door opened; this time to admit Dulcie and Maurice Ingram.

"Ah, Uncle Donald!" said she, springing up to him, "so you managed to come after all, or did Margaret turn you out, and lock the door in your face? Now, be honest, uncle, didn't Margaret turn you out?"

"Nonsense!" said he. "But poor Margaret just likes to fancy she is doing everything, so I thought it would please her if I left her to finish things by herself, even if I have to alter everything afterwards."

"Ah, Donald!" said Miss Bell, who was evidently irrepressible on the one subject then occupying her mind, "such a start that we got when we came home to-night."

"What frightened ye, Bell?"

"Well," said Miss Bell, "I wasn't frightened, at least not after the first moment; but Donald, suppose you use your eyes and try and find out yourself what it is. I think you already know something about it!"

Miss Jean, Maurice Ingram, and Dulcie looked at each other, and for a moment or two there was a silence, only Miss Jean, looking at her sister, said to herself under her breath, "Wait you, my lady, I'll give it to ye for this!"

"What has happened?" said Mr. Ruthven somewhat sternly. "Is any one going to give an explanation?"

There was another pause, and then Miss Jean would have answered, when Dulcie slipped her hand under Maurice Ingram's arm, and standing before Mr. Ruthven, said:

"I will tell you, Uncle Donald; it means that we two—that we like each other very much, and we told

them about it to-day, and Auntie Bell is pleased, that's all."

Dulcie thought that she was speaking very boldly and bravely, but her cheek was somewhat pale, and there was a quiver in her voice.

"I don't understand you," said Mr. Ruthven.

"Oh yes, you do, uncle," said Dulcie, letting go of Maurice Ingram's arm, and taking hold of Mr. Ruthven's. "We want you to say that you have no objection to our being fond of one another."

"Dulcie," said he, "I don't like these nonsenses," and he drew his arm away from her. He knew well enough what it all meant, and he was trying to fight it off as long as he could.

"Donald," said Miss Jean, "I am sorry that this should have been told to you just now in this fashion, and for this discomfort we all owe thanks to Bell; but I think it will be better not to discuss the matter just now."

"On the contrary," said he, "I think it will be better to finish the story; it has such a strange mysterious beginning that I should like to hear the end of it."

"Donald," said Miss Jean, irate, "you are unreasonable. You are trying to puzzle the young ones. You remember well enough what you said to me about them. Well, for once in your life you were right. Now, what have you to say?"

"What have I to say?" said Mr. Ruthven, thoroughly angry. "What has he to say? You are all talking whilst he stands and listens to you; surely it is his place to say his say first."

"I told Miss McInnes this afternoon," said Maurice Ingram, "that I would go to you at any time. Naturally enough I went to her first; it was only this afternoon that I spoke to her of my hopes and wishes. I had no idea that I should see you this evening, and no idea that my case would be laid before you in so strange a manner. If you have been taken by surprise, so have I; and I regret it, for I am afraid it will prejudice you against me. Miss McInnes tells me that you are Dulcie's guardian, and

that I must ask your consent to a marriage between her and me."

As he had proceeded Dulcie's hand had found its way into his, and he stood holding it tightly. Mr. Ruthven saw the movement, and, little as it was, there was something in the way that it was done that told him as plainly as Maurice Ingram's words what there was between them.

"Now, Donald," said Miss Bell, "I'm sure the poor lad has spoken beautifully; just you say, 'I give my consent,' for we don't expect you to be able to make a fine speech."

"No, I do not give my consent," said he; "surely, sir, you cannot expect it. What do I know of you or of your people? I only know that you are a stranger amongst us, and that you have won the affections of my niece. She is very young, and has seen very few people, and nothing of the world; she may know her own mind, and she may not, time will show; and in the meantime it is preposterous to think of anything like a marriage between you."

"I think," said Maurice Ingram, somewhat coolly, "I shall be able to prove satisfactorily to you who I am, and that my position enables me to marry your niece."

"Very likely, very likely!" said Mr. Ruthven. "But in the meantime you will be kind enough to let things rest as they are. I mean that there is nothing beyond ordinary friendship between you and Dulcie."

"Oh, Donald!" broke in Miss Bell, "don't be so unkind to the poor things! I am sure you do not mean what you say! And remember, Dulcie may never get another chance, and I am sure she would not like to be an old maid."

"I think we had better leave the subject just now," said Miss Jean. "Tea is ready, and there is evidently no good to be got from arguing just now."

"And I must be off," said Mr. Ruthven.

"Tuts, nonsense, Donald!" said Miss Jean.

And Dulcie entreated, "Oh, do stop here, uncle! don't be angry and go off like that!"

"I am not at all angry," said he ; " only—only I have suddenly remembered that Margaret will forget all about the curtains in Norman's room. Good night to ye all !"

And he walked quickly out of the room, Dulcie following him closely as he went.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE END OF A DREAM.

IN the meantime Ruby was upstairs looking at her drawings.

Ruby and Dulcie had gone up-stairs together, but Dulcie was speedily ready for tea, and had instantly descended without offering to wait for Ruby, according to their old-established custom. She had talked of nothing else but Maurice, and at the first possible moment she flew down-stairs because Maurice was there.

"How Dulcie has changed !" thought Ruby. "I shall never change like that ; but she never cared for drawing as I did. If only I can succeed, as Mr. Pierrepont says I shall, that will be worth far more than all this nonsense of Dulcie's. I am quite sure that art gives more lasting and real pleasure than anything else."

"Dulcie seems so happy ; of course she is, she has got all that she wishes for ; and when I can paint good pictures, and know that other people think them good, then I shall have all that I wish, and I shall be perfectly happy."

Then she unfastened her portfolio, and looked at her last little sketch. "I think it is not so bad as it might be. I think Mr. Pierrepont will like it ;" and the same dimples that were in Dulcie's cheeks appeared softly in hers. "I know exactly how he will look, and what he will say. He will lean his elbow on the table, and his chin in his hand, and when I put the drawing before him, he will not move his head a bit, he will just turn his eyes round and lower his brows, and look at it, and then after a minute he will either say, 'Um !' with a sort of grunt ;

or else he will say, 'Good!' as if he were very much astonished—I hope he will say, 'Good.' I don't know why it is, but he says the word in a way that is far better than any amount of praise from anybody else."

Then Ruby went down-stairs, saying to herself that it was ever so much more worth living to do something worthy of Mr. Pierrepoint's praise, than to be falling in love with people.

In the hall she saw Dulcie and Mr. Ruthven. She was saying, "Oh, uncle, uncle! don't go away, don't be angry!"

And then he turned round and kissed her as he had never kissed her before. "I am not angry with ye, my bairn, it's with him I am angry. What right has he, a stranger, to come and take you away from us? but I'll never give my consent, never!"

"Oh, Ruby, do come here, and talk to Uncle Donald," cried Dulcie. "He is so angry, and says he will never let me marry Maurice; it is so unkind of him!"

Then Ruby came in between them, and said, "Why not, uncle, is there any reason against it?"

"Reason against it? I should think there was. We know nothing of him; he may be a swindler, a vagabond, he may be married already. What do you, any of you, know about him?"

But Dulcie laughed, then said, "I think he is neither the one nor the other, there is not much fear of that;" and then Ruby added, "Well, uncle, when you have satisfactory proof about him, and know that he is all that can be desired, you surely do not intend to withhold your consent?"

"It will be time enough to see about that when I am satisfied about him, one way or the other."

"And in the meantime," said Ruby, "it is the law of the country to believe a man to be honest until he be proved guilty."

And in another few minutes Mr. Ruthven was gone, and the girls had returned to tea in the wee parlour.

Dulcie was afraid that Maurice Ingram would be offended by Mr. Ruthven's words, and as she entered

the room she looked a little anxiously at him as he stood with his elbow resting on the mantelpiece. But he smiled across to her in a way that clearly showed there was nothing wrong.

Miss Bell was sitting at the tea-table, the picture of misery, with her hands clasped, whilst Miss Jean was saying, "It's just past believing, Bell; I aye said ye would be the ruin of us all some day." Then perceiving that the girls had entered the room, Miss Jean sat down and began to pour out the tea, which had been cooling so long.

So Miss Bell took to drinking her tea, knowing the while that it would be of no use trying to get more than three cups from Jean that night. Then she remembered that the next day was boat-day, that Norman would be coming, and letters as well, and that recalled to her mind that she was owing Miss Donaldson a letter, and she thought over the letter that she had received from her; then suddenly, there being a silence at the table, Miss Bell said, "Oh, by-the-by, Mr. Ingram, I wanted to ask you something,—Was your mother a Scotchwoman, and was her name Laura Archer?"

"You are quite right, Miss Bell," said he, with much interest and astonishment. "How did you know that her people were Glasgow folks, and her name was Archer? But she was very little at home, for she was educated in London, and when she had only left school a month or two, she married; therefore she had so few Scotch friends, and knew so little of Scotland."

"Now that really is very odd," said Miss Bell, flushing with importance and interest; "very odd. My friend, Miss Donaldson, in Glasgow, used to know your mother long ago; and a little while ago I was writing to her, and telling her about how we had become acquainted with you, and in reply she said she wondered whether your mother was the Laura Archer whom she had known long ago, so I determined to ask you about it. Really, I must write to her to-morrow; it is so pleasant when things come about like this."

They were all interested in Miss Bell's information,

and the conversation led on to Maurice Ingram's family, and of course it was a subject of no less interest to them ; and he told them of his father's serious illness, of Una's deformity, and how his mother's whole time and attention was taken up by these two ; and he mentioned Alice's existence, but beyond this, and adding that she was a ward of his father's, and that she lived with them, he said nothing ; but he dwelt long on his three married sisters.

Blanche, the eldest, the cleverest, the prettiest, and the best of them all, he said, was married to a Sir Pelham Lawrence ; and then he told them frankly how she had disappointed him by her marriage. Sir Pelham Lawrence was old enough to be her father ; but he was a baronet, and enormously wealthy, and it was for these reasons that all her friends had been anxious for the match, and for these reasons that she had married him, Maurice Ingram did not hesitate to say. "She lives in great houses," he added, "and gives lots of balls and dinner-parties, has two boys, and spends no end of money, and she says she is happy ; but then she is such a proud girl that she would never own it if she were utterly miserable, after all that I and Florence said to her before her marriage."

The marriage of Laura, the second sister, had turned out a very unhappy one. She had married a gentleman of small estate, in their own county. "She is not a bit pretty," he said ; "but hers was the first marriage in the family, and we used to like him before the marriage, but afterwards we were greatly disappointed in him ; and, in fact, they are so miserable together, that he spends nearly all his time away from home travelling abroad, or at business in London, and they no sooner meet, than he finds that it will be better for him to go away again. Mind you, I do not think that this unfortunate state of things is all his fault, for poor Laura has what I call a sulky temper.

"The third one, Florence, is a darling ; and since Blanche has become such a great lady, Florence has been my favourite. All the others have black eyes and

straight noses ; now neither Florence's eyes nor nose are anything particular, but she has a very nice face, and the sweetest temper. She married for love, as all decent people ought to do ; but it was a long time before she got consent, for Alexander Selwyn is not very well off. He is a barrister in London, and he is not a Catholic."

This fact slipped out unconscious of its significance ; and then Miss Jean said, "Not a Catholic ! a Roman Catholic ? well, I should say that was a mercy. Did the others marry Romans ?"

"Yes, both of them," said he.

"Great patience ! guidness abune ! what a like thing to happen, two such awful marriages in one family !"

Dulcie's eyes met Maurice Ingram's. She felt afresh the blow which he had given her on that Sunday afternoon when she first heard of his religion ; and she knew what a strong, and in all probability fatal, bar it would be to their union when this became known to her relations. He only said to himself, "Hullo, here's a pretty go ! I must take care not to let the old lady know the state of things." A glance at Dulcie's face showed him the disquiet there, and he decidedly felt that "it was a nuisance."

And as he walked home that night and thought over things in general, he acknowledged that he had altogether put his foot in it, right and left, pretty considerably. "There are the people in the Rhineland," he said to himself, "and there are the people here. The people in the Rhineland think I am engaged to Alice, and they also know all about 'that.' The people here do not know that I stand engaged to Alice, and they know nothing of 'that ;' and God forbid that they ever should know."

The next day came Norman for his few days' Christmas holiday ; and the next day, Christmas Eve, Maurice Ingram took himself off to Glasgow—to purchase some gifts for his sisters, as the others thought ; to visit the Roman Catholic church, as Dulcie knew. They had had some conversation together about this, and he had stated *his intention* of remaining quietly at Arran, and of not

going to church at all; and it was she who had begged him to go, until he promised that he would do so, and return with the boat on the following day.

The boat that took away Maurice Ingram, had also a letter on board from Miss Bell, to her friend Miss Donaldson, in Glasgow. The letter carried both the tidings of Dulcie's engagement and the information that the name of Maurice Ingram's mother had been indeed Laura Archer.

Norman Ruthven came again amongst them, as Miss Bell said he always did, like a bit of sunshine. He had quite recovered from the fit of sulks in which he had indulged during his last visit. He came full of delight to be at home again, to be near Ruby, conscious that all his friends were glad to have him again, and conscious, moreover, that he had got a rise in the office and in his hitherto sparely furnished pocket, and that his moustache had made wonderful progress. No wonder, therefore, that the shadow of care sat so lightly on his brow, as to be indiscernible. No wonder that those he passed on the road looked twice at him, saying as they did so, that it was a good thing to look at such a bright face.

Although they were so delighted to see him land, as they stood on the quay to welcome him, a stranger would scarcely have noticed that they were pleased about anything, for the people of the North are not a demonstrative race, and they can be stirred to the utmost depths of their nature, and yet scarce show it by the smallest outward sign. Dulcie was the most demonstrative of the family; but in the presence of the others she, to a great degree, curbed her impulsiveness.

When Norman sprang on shore, out of the little boat that brought the passengers from the steamer, Dulcie was the first to greet him, with one hand holding his arm, and with the other shaking hands. "We knew you, Norman, when you were still in the steamer; we recognised you," she said, with bright welcoming smiles.

From his father, who was more happy than any of them in his presence, he got the smallest show of welcome. Mr. Ruthven gave his son an abrupt hand-shake, and

without a second look at him, he asked whether he had anything else in the shape of luggage besides the bag which he carried. Then they walked along the road towards home, in a sort of circle round Norman.

They parted at the cross-roads ; the others walked up the hill, and Norman and his father continued their way along the road.

"That fellow is still here, I see," were Norman's first words when he and his father were alone.

"And likely to remain," was the answer.

"How so?"

"Because—well, because he is engaged to Dulcie."

"Never!" and Norman having cried out this word in all astonishment, came to a full pause in the road, and stared at his father.

"It is, indeed ; and, Norman, I was just wearying to see ye, ever since I heard it."

"Do you like him?"

"No."

"Why do you not try to stop it then?"

"I have not given consent. But, Norman, what end do I gain by that? I know that it is to be ; and I have seen them often enough together to know that it is a serious business, and I know that I might just as well put out my hand to stay a storm as to try to keep those two apart."

They walked on in silence for a while ; then Norman spoke again, for while love was beating so warmly in his heart it was impossible for him to be dead to all feelings of sympathy, or callous where love was concerned.

"Father," he said, "I cannot say why it is, but you and I have evidently taken a dislike to this Maurice Ingram. I do not think that men are the best judges of men. It is impossible for us to know what a man can be to a woman whom he loves ; because he has not made a favourable impression on us, is no reason why he should not be able to love Dulcie truly and well, or why he should not make her a good husband. During this last month or two, while I was away, you must have had many opportunities of getting better acquainted with

him. Has he done any one thing of which you did not approve?"

"No, not exactly; he always acts and speaks as a gentleman should. Naturally enough, he has been very polite up at the house yonder, and he has been most polite to me, but I really know nothing more of him than I did when you left us. No, it is not that; it is a sort of instinctive aversion which I have for him, and these instincts never led me wrong yet, and if I ever neglected to follow them I always regretted it afterwards."

"Father, I am afraid we are uncharitable, for he came amongst us a stranger, therefore it was impossible for us to know more of him. He isn't even a countryman, or we would soon find out all about him. I suppose you will make some inquiries about him. How shall you set to work?"

"I know already who he is—the only son of Mr. Ingram of Hunstanleigh. I know nothing of the family above and beyond its existence, and that they live on their own estate, which is, I believe, a good one. The family are travelling abroad now on account of the father's health; but when he has ascertained that his family have no objection to his marriage with Dulcie, I do not see what I can do. Of course I should communicate myself with them before the marriage took place."

"Well, father, now that I am getting over my first astonishment at the stupendous fact of Dulcie's being engaged to be married, I see no reason why all should not turn out well and happily—and I do hope that it will, poor old Dulcie!—I should not like her to get a disappointment, for she is not the sort of girl to do anything by halves."

"Would you really like to see her married to any one she happened to like?" said his father, watching his face.

"Of course I should. Nothing would give me greater pleasure," said Norman heartily.

Mr. Ruthven gave one sigh, and looked straight along the road, without fixing his eyes on any one thing. This

was the end of a golden dream, which had given him years of happy thought in life, and after the fashion in which the things of this world do fall on our heads and crush us, it was the two for whom he had dreamt this golden dream that had shattered it in ruins at his feet. It had all gone, was all faded like a rosy sunset cloud, and he could only watch the spot whence it had disappeared with a sore heart, and seal his deep disappointment with a sigh.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BEWARE OF THE OPAL.

ON Christmas Day there were two arrivals by the boat. Maurice Ingram returned from his short visit to Glasgow, and Harold Pierrepont from London.

"I cannot stay long here," he said, "my business is not nearly completed in London. That is the worst of business; directly you have anything to do with it, it grapples hold of you, and it is a very long time before you can wriggle yourself out of its grasp. But I wanted very much to come and spend Christmas and the New Year with you; one wants to have friends about one at this season, and I have so few friends, and none that I care for much, out of this place."

So that there was to be quite a dinner-party at Tigh-na-Beinne that day, and Miss Jean was in her element with her preparations. It was the old custom for the Ruthvens to dine at Miss Jean's on Christmas Day, and for Miss Jean's party to dine with the Ruthvens on New Year's Day.

Maurice Ingram was of the Christmas Day party. Donald Ruthven could not prevent it, nor could he behave otherwise than civilly towards him; but as far as Donald Ruthven went, this Christmas Day was a failure. Harold Pierrepont would have agreed with him, for about an hour before dinner Miss Bell told him of Dulcie's engagement, as she persisted in calling it, in

spite of Miss Jean's repeated protest, that for the present it was *not* to be called an engagement. The news was not unexpected, but yet he did not realise it until he heard the words spoken by Miss Bell, and the consequence was that he failed to appreciate all the good things which Miss Jean had prepared for that day.

The usual dinner hour, two o'clock, had for this day been given up, and they dined at five o'clock by lamplight, which Dulcie said "helped to make it all the grander." It was just before the dinner hour, when Miss Bell was altering some ferns which stood on the middle of the table, in the wee parlour, where they were to dine, that Dulcie rushed in and said :

"Oh, auntie, look here!"

Miss Bell's nerves were in a flutter in a moment. What could have happened? But Dulcie merely sidled up to her, saying, "Just look!" and held up her finger, where the lamplight fell brightly on it.

There had never before been a ring on Dulcie's fingers, but now there was a broad, thick gold circle, with some flashing stones, on her third finger.

Miss Bell was fairly dazzled, and lifted up both her hands, and with a quickness of understanding which she rarely exhibited on other subjects, Miss Bell at once said :

"And he gave ye that!"

"Yes, auntie. Did you ever see anything so beautiful?"

"When did he give it to ye?"

"Just now, before them all, only they are sitting in the firelight, and he got hold of my finger and put it on. The others could not see, and I was utterly astonished."

"Oh, lassie, give it to him back! Make him take it away again," said Miss Bell suddenly. She had been closely examining the new ring, and now she looked up with positive fright in her eyes—"You must not keep it, indeed, indeed; believe me!"

"Why not?"

"Why not! Just look at these stones between the big diamonds. They are opals, and there was never an opal yet that did not bring misfortune to its possessor. There was never an opal engagement ring yet given that

did not surely bring about the breaking of the betrothal, or in some way or other precede grief and misery. Give it to him back, Dulcie ; you must indeed ! You are too young to have had anything like the experience of things connected with opals that I have had, and I know that if you do not ask him to change the ring, you will rue the day that you first wore it."

Miss Bell was speaking so very earnestly, and in all ways so differently from her usual mode of speech, that Dulcie, in spite of herself, was somewhat impressed. However, she laughed, and said :

"Well, auntie, if you like, we will say that the exception proves the rule. I am not afraid of misfortune, not a bit. I wouldn't let Maurice change this ring for anything in the world. Why, already I love it more than anything I have or ever had."

"That's just nonsense, Dulcie ; you need not think that you are different from the rest of the world. Time has shown over and over again that opals are unlucky stones, and time will show it again——" Miss Bell would have added more had not Barbara just then entered the room with great importance, followed by Sandy, and Sandy's niece Maggie, and all bearing portions of the dinner.

Dulcie turned away and resolutely closed the hand that wore the ring, determining that no silly, foolish tales should induce her to part with her ring, which, as she had said, she already loved more than anything she had ; and she sat down to her Christmas dinner with the diamonds on her finger sparkling in the eyes of everybody. Ruby was the only one of the party likely to notice it, and just before they had sat down Dulcie had begged her to make no remark on it.

To all save Donald Ruthven and Harold Pierpoint that Christmas Day party was a great success ; the dinner was everything that even Miss Jean and Barbara could desire, and Sandy's niece Maggie, who had been had in to help, was so lost in admiration at the manner in which the different dishes were served up, that she thought it

her duty to be continually calling the attention of the guests to their excellence.

In the evening they played at a number of queer old Scotch games, over which there was a great deal of fun and merriment, Miss Jean and Donald Ruthven as usual leading the nonsense and laughter. Dulcie said afterwards that it had been the happiest evening that she had ever spent, and Ruby said that she agreed with her.

When the guests were gone, and the girls were alone, they both devoted themselves for a while to admiration of Dulcie's ring. They both agreed that it was the most beautiful ring that they had ever seen. Certainly they had not had many opportunities of judging of jewellery.

By-and-by, when they had ended their discussions about the ring, Ruby, before she could think of going to sleep, unfastened her portfolio—Harold Pierrepont had asked her so anxiously whether she had been working, and how she had been getting on, telling her that he was longing to see what she had been doing. So she turned them over in the portfolio with a pleased smile, and thought of the morrow, when he was to come and see them. When she came to look more closely at her drawings she was somewhat disappointed in them, they were not so well pencilled as they had stood in her remembrance whilst she had been telling Harold Pierrepont of them, but there was one particular one that pleased her right well. She determined that she would not show that one first, she would keep it till the last, and he would look at it and say, "Good!" And as she thought over the manner in which he would say this, a smile broke brightly over her face; then wondering what Dulcie would be thinking of this smile, she looked up quickly, but Dulcie was at the other end of the room, still dreaming over her ring.

For the next few days things went smoothly and pleasantly enough. The news of Dulcie's engagement had spread all over the village, and everywhere she went she received congratulations; nor did Miss Jean deny the engagement, for she saw no reason why it should not

stand, always provided that the two chiefly concerned should be contented to wait for a year or two, and in the meantime not to behave in a daft-like fashion. And Maurice Ingram was a great favourite of hers, and if it was Dulcie's lot to marry, why better she should marry him than any one.

Miss Bell was in a state of the utmost bliss—two real lovers engaged to be married just under her nose, whom she could watch and study at any and every moment. Such a treat had not come in her way since the engagement of Dulcie's mother, and that had been but a very short one, and entirely against the wishes of Miss Jean, who had tried her utmost to break it off, so that her enjoyment had then been mixed with fear and trembling.

It was in the midst of her most innocent happiness that a letter to Miss Bell arrived from Miss Donaldson in Glasgow.

Miss Bell tore the seal whilst she was walking along the road. It was a very long letter, the reading of which would be a pleasure to her during the afternoon; she, however, could not resist just reading a few lines just to think about as she was going along. The letter began:—

“DEAR BELL,—Events do indeed come about strangely. To think that Laura Archer's son should now be in Arran! how much I should like to see him! Poor Laura Archer! She is the most unfortunate woman I know; first of all to marry into a Popish family, and then be converted herself to their heathenish practices! Could you expect that a blessing would rest on such a marriage? and can you wonder that she should have a son turn out as hers has turned out? I have been speaking to her cousin, James Archer, and in confidence he has told me a great deal about the family. As you are on such intimate terms with Maurice Ingram, I suppose you know all that I know, and I can only say how greatly astonished, how amazed I was that you and Jean should have permitted this engagement between him and wee Dulcie. Surely you cannot know all the facts in the case. I mean, do you know

what it is that he has done, that has well-nigh broken his father's and mother's hearts—but I will tell you all I know——”

Miss Bell at this point became aware that somebody was speaking to her, and she looked up into Mr. Ruthven's face with an utterly bewildered expression on hers, and instead of saying, “Good morning,” she was repeating, “Mercy me!—mercy me!”

“Bell! are ye daft, lass?” said he.

Miss Bell merely shook her head.

“Is anything wrong, Bell?” and he pointed to the letter still held open in her hand.

“To think!” she began, and again left off and shook her head.

“It's Flora Donaldson. She says that our Maurice Ingram is nothing better than a Roman Catholic.”

“Well,” said Mr. Ruthven, “I am not surprised; I have heard that his father is a Catholic, and I was wondering how it was with him. What do ye think that Jean will say to this?”

“Mercy me, Donald, but this is an evil day, and who in this wide world would have thought it? You say a Catholic. It's far worse than that; the Church of England folks call themselves Catholics, but the Ingrams are just Popish Romans!”

They had arrived at the cross roads, and Donald Ruthven said, “Good-by just now, Bell, I will be up to talk with Jean in the afternoon.”

Then Miss Bell hurried up the hill-side stumbling in her excitement over the stones in the somewhat rugged road, and Donald Ruthven, looking after her, smiled to himself, saying the while, “Up in Glasgow yonder, they say, ‘Wise folk, daft folk, and the Pattersons;’ I think, we may say, ‘Wise folk, daft folk, and our Bell.’” And he went on his way.

For the last few days Miss Bell had put aside the bonnet she was in the habit of wearing, and had taken a certain bright blue bonnet into wear. Dulcie wickedly said that this was on account of Harold Pierrepont's

presence. However, be that as it may, the blue was not very becoming after all, for it was a crude raw shade, and in the biting winter wind it would have been hard to say whether Miss Bell's face or the bonnet were the bluer.

When she had delivered over the other letters to their owners, she hurried off to her room, there to read in peace and quiet the all-disturbing letter which she had received.

Ruby and Dulcie had letters from schoolfellows, Miss Jean had letters, and they were merry and busy over them whilst Barbara was preparing the dinner, and Miss Bell up-stairs was reading her letter.

The dinner-bell rang, and the girls hastily folded up their letters, saying, "Oh, there is the bell! I am so glad dinner is ready." Miss Jean rose and put coals on the fire, then led the way to the wee parlour. But up-stairs, Miss Bell, who had also heard the bell, looked up from her letter into the looking-glass before her; her face was positively white, and her hands trembled as she tried to fold up the letter. She sat silently for a few moments, absently looking at herself in the glass. Then she put the letter in her pocket and again sat motionless, till a clear, ringing call came from down-stairs, "Auntie Bell!"

It was Dulcie's voice. And then, as one in a dream, Miss Bell rose and went down-stairs, and took her place at the dinner-table.

She heard nothing that was being said; she saw nothing that they did; only the writing of that letter lay before her eyes, only its words were ringing in her ears.

Shortly after dinner Mr. Ruthven appeared amongst them, and Miss Bell remembered that he had come to talk to Jean upon the subject of Maurice Ingram's religion. But this had almost faded from her mind, since she had read the terrible afterpart of Miss Donaldson's letter.

Mr. Ruthven requested that he might be left alone with Miss Jean. So they returned to the wee parlour, and Miss Bell to her room up-stairs, to re-read that horrible letter, and to torment herself with questionings as to

whether it was her duty or not to tell all that it contained to Jean or Donald.

It would be a terrible task, and one that she shrank from with every nerve of her body. Indecision was her weakest point; once call upon her to make up her mind one way or another, and it instantly became impossible to her to do so. What should she do? Oh, for some one to direct her and tell her what was her duty! A matter of so much importance had never before been laid on her shoulders. She would wait and see,—wait and see.

So the afternoon sped on, and Maurice Ingram came up to hear what was going on,—whether there was to be any walk that afternoon, or whether they had any commissions that they wished him to execute. It was bitterly cold, and he shuddered, in spite of his fur-lined coat.

His tall, slight figure no sooner appeared in the drive, than Miss Jean perceived him from the big parlour windows, and she stepped out into the hall and met him as he entered.

“Will you just come ben to the big parlour?” said Miss Jean; whilst Dulcie, who had run out into the hall, would have followed him and Miss Jean, but Miss Jean stopped her, saying, “No, Dulcie; go you back to the wee parlour. I wish to speak on an important subject with Mr. Ingram.”

Mr. Ingram was somewhat astonished, and after hanging up the fur coat, delaying for a moment with Dulcie, as she assisted therein, he followed Miss Jean into the big parlour.

And Dulcie was left to wonder what could be the matter, and what could possibly be transpiring in the big parlour. To try and turn her attention from this, she went into the kitchen, and desired Barbara to bring her the things, that she was going to make scones for tea. At length she became interested in her work, and forgot how time was passing. “I wonder how Ruby is getting on with that drawing,” she thought. “I will just take her a scone. She is sure to be hungry;” and picking up one of her just finished scones, she ran off to the wee parlour.

As she opened the door, she heard a voice say with much emphasis, "Good!"

Harold Pierrepont was sitting at the table, looking at a drawing, and Ruby, with a glow on her cheeks and deep pleasure in her clear hazel eyes, was beside him. This was not one of the best drawings, not the one she had thought that he would say "Good!" to. That one he had not yet seen.

"Here is a scone," said Dulcie; "but only one. I can't help it, though. When I left the room there was only one,—how could I imagine there would be two when I returned? There, I will tear it in half, so that you cannot quarrel."

"You have been gone an hour, or thereabouts," said Ruby.

"Really! I had no idea that it was so long. Ruby, what can be the matter? Why are Auntie Jean and Uncle Donald and Maurice having all this long, mysterious talk?"

"I cannot imagine," said Ruby.

"If they are much longer, I shall go in and ask them what it is all about." Then Dulcie returned to the kitchen, to pack the scones together, to keep them warm for tea.

In another few moments Ruby heard a door open. Then the wee parlour door opened hastily, and Maurice Ingram, with a flush of colour on his olive face, stood in the doorway, looking round, and said, "Where is Dulcie?"

"In the kitchen," said Ruby, somewhat wondering at his tone.

He pulled the door to, somewhat noisily, and they heard his footsteps dying away down the passage. He hastily entered the kitchen, and regardless of Barbara, he seized Dulcie in his arms, and held her closely. "Dulcie! Dulcie! they want to separate us!" he cried.

"Oh, Maurice, no!" was all she could say.

"They have heard that I am a Catholic," he said. "Confusion seize whoever has told them! And your aunt and uncle utterly forbid me ever again to think of a

marriage with you as possible, at no future time, or ever again. I wouldn't have believed them to be such blind idiots, such bigoted fools."

Barbara was standing aghast, with clasped hands and wondering eyes; and Maurice Ingram, scarce knowing what he was saying, was boiling with angry passion.

"Dulcie, they say I am never to see you again. Speak to me—tell me what to do!"

He had no sooner said this, than the whole party—Miss Jean, Donald Ruthven, Harold Pierrepont, and Ruby—came together into the kitchen; and the anger in Maurice Ingram's eyes, which had been dying out, rekindled as soon as he perceived them again; and still holding Dulcie, he turned her round, so that they together faced the others, and loudly his voice rang out, "Swear that you will keep true to me, Dulcie; that you will forsake all these, and be my wife!"

"Stay, lassie, stay!" said Donald Ruthven, with his hand on her arm; "be wise; you do not know what you are going to say—be wise, now!"

"Before them all!" shouted Maurice, greatly excited, "before them all, promise me that you will be through everything true to me!"

"Before them all, Maurice," wailed Dulcie, trying to steady her voice, "I promise to be true to you, through everything, and always."

Then, holding her face between his two hands, he kissed her, whispered something in her ear, pushed his way through them, and was gone.

And Dulcie was left standing alone in the middle of the group; and Miss Bell, who had joined them, thought that she would faint, for her cheek grew pale. But she did no such thing. She never moved or spoke till Ruby said, "Come away!" and took her by the hand, and in this fashion they walked away together, as Donald Ruthven said, "Just as they used to do when they were wee bairnies long ago."

CHAPTER XXV.

"YOU WILL BE SORRY."

ON New Year's Day the party was smaller by one than on Christmas Day, for Maurice Ingram had returned to Shiskin, leaving apparently no relic of his presence, for his name was not mentioned amongst them.

If Dulcie ever spoke of him, it was when she was alone with Ruby, for the others never heard her mention his name, and on every subject connected with him she maintained a dignified silence.

To her mind, both she and Maurice had been hardly and badly used, somehow or other, by every one of them, from Uncle Donald downwards; and after that first conversation she had had with Miss Jean on the subject, when she had told her that she had been greatly deceived and bitterly disappointed both in her and in Mr. Ingram, she added that anything that had passed between them must be cancelled and finished for ever, as she could never permit such an awful thing in her house as the marriage of one of its members with a Papist.

Dulcie knew well enough that Miss Jean would never alter her opinion or change her words, therefore in all common sense she must make up her mind that all was over for her and Maurice.

But it is not only hard, it is impossible for youth to believe that all its brightest hopes and wishes can never be fulfilled. Dulcie knew better than any one could tell her her aunt's determination of purpose and strong will. She knew only too well the difficulties which surrounded on every side the story of her love; and yet, and yet, she had taken hold of happiness when it came to her with such a firm and ready grasp, that when trouble and difficulty came she grappled it but the firmer, with energy and determination to hold on till death. Maurice loved her, had whispered passionate words in her ear at the moment of their parting, and surely out of this some manner of means might yet be found, some hidden path

disclose itself at the eleventh hour, whereon she and Maurice might yet travel hand in hand.

She was hurt, sore, and angry with Miss Jean, and deeming her unreasonable, had determined for the first time in her life to fight for herself and to deny Auntie Jean's infallibility.

But Dulcie was mistaken in one thing: she deemed Miss Jean unsympathising and incapable of understanding what she felt for Maurice, or what Maurice felt for her. She did not yet know that each person who loves says, "Surely mortal has never before loved as I love." She did not know that Miss Jean had said that in her day, and that she was now sympathising and sorrowing for Dulcie, and for Maurice too. Only with long-standing experience she said to herself, "It is sore on them now, but time—time, will cure even that."

It did not occur to her that Dulcie, who in her eyes was yet so very young, was doubting her decision, her right of judgment. She was well aware of her own strength of will, and that all her family were under its sway; and herein she erred, but it was from ignorance that in Dulcie had developed a will and determination almost equalling her own.

And on this New Year's Day Dulcie carried matters with a high hand. She determined that no one should perceive her wound. In her own merry way she kept up a continual flow of nonsense and talk, making the rest, one by one, join in to keep up the fun; and she deceived them completely, for they thought "She repents already of ever thinking of marrying a Catholic, and is doing her best to get over it."

Still they almost wondered at her, for she seemed to be in strangely wild spirits, and certainly tended more than anyone else to make the evening the pleasant time that it was.

Whilst they were all standing in the hall about to depart, Dulcie was pulling on her big warm gloves, when the diamonds in her ring caught the light and flashed right bravely and directly into Mr. Ruthven's eyes. He was standing near her, and he pointed to it and said

softly to her, "You must send that back." He would not have said this had he not been deceived by her manner into believing that she was on a fair road to recovery.

She stepped back and away from him, and then moved out into the cold clear moonlight, calling from outside, "Good night, Uncle Donald. A happy, bright new year to us all!"

Harold Pierrepont followed her, and they two led the way home, keeping all the while at some distance ahead of the others.

They walked on silently for a time, until he suddenly began :

"Dulcie, I can't help telling you how very, very sorry I am that you should have to suffer in this way. That is just the fate of things; when one cares tremendously about anything, it is quite sure to go to smash. I cannot tell you exactly what I feel, only I could not help letting you know that I was sympathising with you."

Dulcie did not answer, so he continued :

"You spoke so bravely the other evening, I don't know what I would not have given to hear you speak like that for me,—I mean if anybody would feel like that for me : but still I think it was cowardly of him to put you to such a test."

"Cowardly, Mr. Pierrepont ! what do you mean ? I think it was so good of him still to care for me after all that had been said to him."

Dulcie spoke with such energy that Harold Pierrepont felt that he must not say what he thought on the subject.

"Do not be angry with me, Dulcie," he said ; "the very last thing I would do is to offend you ; but you see men feel differently in these things."

"You are very kind, Mr. Pierrepont," she said. "I do appreciate your sympathy, for I get so very little of it just now ; even Ruby is only a faint-hearted friend. It is hard, for I never before wanted it so much."

"I only wish I could do more to show you how much I feel for you."

"Ah, Mr. Pierrepont, I think you might do a great deal for me, for Uncle Donald and all of them think so much of you and what you say, and if only you would tell them that Maurice is not so bad as they think him. Can't you speak for him? You know better than I do what would have most weight with Uncle Donald,—I mean that you know better than I do what things men lay most stress on, and just say all this for Maurice. He does deserve it all, Mr. Pierrepont ; indeed you none of you know him as I know him ; but what you say will have more influence on Uncle Donald than any one else's words."

Harold Pierrepont had not bargained for this, and he was silent.

"You said," continued she, "that you wished you could do more to testify that you felt with me. Perhaps I am asking too much, for I know"—and then she attempted her old merry tone—"what cowards men are."

He very nearly said, "Yes, Dulcie, you are asking me too much." For although he was grievously sorry for Dulcie, and regretted that such disappointment should have fallen on her, he did not feel quite ready to go and plead another man's cause for her. It was asking too much of him, and for a short time he argued with himself as to whether he could act this bit of hypocrisy, and then he said :

"What could I possibly say? You see this kind of thing is different to everything else, and very likely Mr. Ruthven would think that I was interfering, and so on ; but still——"

"Never mind ! I do not suppose it would really do any good," said Dulcie, hastily, for her pride was somewhat hurt, and she regretted having made her request to Harold Pierrepont. "Men are all alike," she said to herself ; "all selfish, deceitful and cowardly—all of them with one exception."

And she hastily turned the conversation, and resumed the bright manner that she had kept up all the evening, and tried to hide from him that he had disappointed her.

But in this she did not succeed, for he plainly saw

the sudden way in which she had altered her tone and her manner altogether that she was hurt and vexed, and he would have given worlds to have had the power to fulfil her wishes, anything rather than fall in her estimation. And he said, "Surely I am more tried than most men; or do all men whom we meet about with grinning faces get tried sorely and bitterly in their turn as I am tried now?"

Then they parted; and the next day Harold Pierrepont returned to London, and Norman Ruthven to Glasgow.

Miss Jean, Miss Bell, and Ruby went down to the quay to see them off, but Dulcie remained at home.

And it was whilst they were still standing on the quay, watching the steamer on its way, that Donald Ruthven remarked to Miss Jean, as he had remarked to Dulcie, that the diamond ring must decidedly be returned to its donor, and Miss Jean fully agreed with him; but said she had merely been waiting to see what Dulcie would do in the matter of her own accord.

Dulcie they found practising at the piano in the big parlour when they returned from the quay. Miss Jean waited until the others had left the room, and then she said, "Dulcie, you must send that ring back to Mr. Ingram, you know."

Dulcie flushed; but there was no answer.

"You ought to have done so before," added Miss Jean.

"There is no occasion to return it," said Dulcie.

"No occasion! you are very much mistaken."

"He would not like me to return it, and I mean to keep it," said Dulcie stolidly.

"Then, Dulcie, I must insist that it is returned, and at once."

"Auntie Jean, you are very unkind. Surely I have been worried enough in this matter. Why cannot I keep my ring?"

"You ought to know that, under the circumstances, that is impossible. I wonder at you for even thinking of *not* returning the ring!"

"Auntie Jean, I think that in this I know best. I really must keep my ring."

Miss Jean could scarcely believe her ears. Dulcie openly declaring different opinions to her aunt's, and avowing her intention of standing by them in bold rebellion! So it had come to the point of will against will, and Miss Jean held out her hand, saying, "Just give me that ring!"

"Do not ask me for it, for I have told you that I mean to keep it."

"Must I say again that I insist on your giving me that ring?"

There was a moment's pause; then Dulcie took off her ring, and held it out at arm's length to Miss Jean, saying, "There is the ring. I am sorry to part with it, and you will be sorry for having made me part with it."

"What is the matter, Dulcie?" said Ruby, a few minutes later, when Dulcie entered their room.

"Oh, Ruby! Ruby! look."

"What is it?"

"Look at my empty finger! they have taken my ring away."

"Well!" and there was a short pause, and Ruby added, "it is a pity; but I thought you would have to send it back,—it is customary."

"Customary!—how can you use such a word now? What do I care for custom? It was my own ring and he wished me never to part with it."

"Well, dear, I am very, very sorry; but you see it really would not have done at all for you to keep it."

Dulcie looked at her sister, saying to herself, "Who has changed? is it Ruby, or is it I? We used not to be so different some time ago." But one thing was evident, there was no sympathy to be got from Ruby, and she thought over all her friends. They were all against her, all—even her ring taken, and Maurice was away.

And whilst poor Dulcie was feeling very forlorn and miserable, Miss Jean, down stairs in the wee parlour, was making up a very neat, tidy package containing the ring, and she was no sooner satisfied with the appearance

of the package, than she herself went out of the house with it.

She went to a small farmer in the village, who, amongst other possessions, rejoiced in a horse and cart; and presently, having found him at home, she commenced an earnest conversation with him. "Well, John, now I think you fully understand what I mean; and you must ask Mr. Ingram just to be kind enough to write a couple of words in pencil to say that he has received the packet."

"Ay, mem; I quite understand," was the answer; and Miss Jean found her way back home, congratulating herself on having accomplished this difficult business.

John found his way over to Shiskin all in good time, his horse going the weary length of hill, up on one side and down on the other, at a slowness of pace that would have almost maddened any one not accustomed to the pace of an extra slow cart-horse; but there is an end to the most weary way, and Shiskin was reached, and Mr. Ingram found, and the packet was delivered to him.

Maurice Ingram, from the size of the package, at once guessed what it contained, and for the moment his heart misgave him, as he put it in his pocket.

"If ye will be sae kind, Maister Ingram, but Miss McInnes wished ye tae write doon twa words in pencil, or maybe it was three, jist that ye've the packet in ye're ain hands."

"Very well, I will write a note."

"No, it wasna that, either; just three words in pencil, nae mair."

"Very well," said Maurice smiling, "here goes." And he wrote in pencil, "Packet received; thanks."

Then he found means of looking at the parcel, unobserved by John, and found no word or message enclosed, so he proceeded to question John, and very soon he fully understood how it had all come about, and how it was that the ring was again in his hands. He never for one moment doubted Dulcie. He knew full well that, come what might, she was true and steadfast to him.

Ere night came on, John was on his road back to

Brodict with two notes, if the note of three words could be called a note ; for gold can do much, and gold had made John understand that he was perfectly capable of carrying privately a small note to Miss Dulcie Duncan, to be delivered to her at the first possible moment when he could catch her alone.

"Puir things ! I'm thinking the auld bodies are unco hard on them whiles and again !" remarked John to himself as he trudged on his way.

That evening Barbara brought into the wee parlour, on a tray, a piece of white paper.

"John Gillespie wished this tae be given tae Miss McInnes," she said.

"Put it on the table," said Miss Bell ; "she will be here in a short time."

Barbara retired, and the eyes of the three were directed at once to the piece of white paper on the table. There were three words pencilled thereon, and the three pairs of eyes being women's eyes, they could in a very short time stand it no longer ; with one accord they all rose and read the three words—they were, "Packet received ; thanks," and in Maurice Ingram's handwriting. And Dulcie went to bed with a sore heart.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE SNOW.

JOHN GILLESPIE was troubled in his mind the next morning ; instead of following his usual customs, he neglected his work and hung about the road, and even entered the wood at the back of the McInnes's house, for the purpose of collecting firewood. As the morning sped on he became impatient,—“What will I do at all ?” he said ; “maybe it will be best jist tae speak tae Barbara, to tell her tae send Miss Dulcie oot here. Na, na, that'll no dae, Barbara will no be able to haud her tongue mair than the rest o' her sex.”

Dinner-time came, and John Gillespie, heartily sick of his new business, was trudging downhill, on his way home, when he saw in the road before him Ruby and Dulcie, hastening along.

"Now what in this world will I do?" thought he. "Something maun transpire frae this meeting, or maybe I'll never get anither."

"It's a fine day, leddies," he said, coming up before them. "Miss Ruby," and he pointed downhill into a field, "d'ye see thon cow?"

Ruby looked hard, but saw no cow; and at the same time Dulcie felt her arm touched with a vigorous movement, and looking down she perceived that John Gillespie held a letter, which he was evidently very desirous for her to take. She took it, and one glance showed her Maurice Ingram's handwriting; and a crimson flush came over her cheek as her hand closed upon it.

"What cow, John Gillespie?" said Ruby. But John Gillespie's brain had rarely been in such a whirl as at the present moment. He was immensely proud of his success; but in trying to attract Ruby's attention at the same moment, he succeeded in utterly bewildering himself, and he said, "Ou aye, Miss Ruby, it is rael odd like, but it's jist thon cow," and he fled downhill.

"Surely John Gillespie is demented!" laughed Ruby, turning to Dulcie, and Dulcie joined right heartily in her laugh; indeed she could have danced all the way home, she was so delighted to feel safely possessed of the letter she had just received.

At the first possible moment she tore it open and devoured its contents. "Only a few lines," she said as she opened it, and read, "I do not return your ring to you, I will put it on myself. Come alone to the Fairies' Glen on Thursday morning or afternoon, or on Friday morning."

So she was to see him again, in spite of them all, and so soon! To-morrow was Thursday; and she would go to the Fairies' Glen, right or wrong; and for the rest of the day, whenever she found herself alone, she constantly began singing,

"He said, think na lang, lassie, though I gang awa',
For I'll come back and see thee in spite o' them a'."

It was Thursday afternoon when she found her way alone to the Fairies' Glen, which was now bare and leafless. It was a cheerless afternoon, with a biting north wind and grey clouds scudding wildly across the sky, the sea and mountains of a dull leaden grey.

But Dulcie and her sister had from their earliest years been accustomed to face the weather, whatever it might be. Now she trotted on unmindful of the biting wind, only remembering that she was going to meet Maurice.

And she met him, long before she reached the Fairies' Glen, for he was up on the moor-side waiting and watching for her.

They found the most sheltered spot that they could, behind an overhanging sand-bank, and creeping under its rude shelter they sat and talked.

It was the first conversation that they had had since Miss Jean and Donald Ruthven had forbidden their engagement. So that there was a great deal to talk about; but first of all Dulcie had her ring again safe on her finger, and then he heard the story of its being sent back to him; and she further told him that they were all against her, that she had not received one grain of sympathy from any one of them.

And then it was that he said, "Dulcie, there is but one thing to be done: we will be married at once."

"Married, Maurice! you know that they will never allow it."

"I do know that; and as we two have to live our own lives, choose our own manner of living, and we have already chosen one another, as they forbid our marriage, we must marry without their leave."

But Dulcie could not yet understand the possibility of this tremendous move, and he talked for a very long while before she could for one moment entertain the idea.

"But Maurice," she said at length, "we could not be married without being cried in the church, and then

they would hear of it. Do you not see that it is utterly impossible?"

"Don't tell me that it is impossible!" he said; "why, in Scotland one can be married so very easily; for instance, at the registrar's office."

"And in the Roman Catholic Church as well, I suppose?" said Dulcie.

"As we chose. The marriage would hold good if we were married by a Protestant ceremony alone, as this is a Protestant country; but the Catholic ceremony alone would not hold in this country."

And then she entertained the idea as a possibility for a few moments, and dwelt on it; then again she declared it to be utterly impossible.

How many times she did this it is impossible to say, whilst she and Maurice sheltered themselves under the old sand-bank from the wind; and the short afternoon drew in, and he was still arguing, she hesitating; "and when a woman hesitates——"

"I must go; really I must go!" she had once or twice said, and again stayed on; but the one great point was decided, they were to be married immediately; the discussion now was merely as to ways and means of bringing it about.

They were to be married at the registrar's and at the Roman Catholic church also, and Maurice Ingram decided to leave by the Ardrossan boat the next day, Friday, to make all arrangements, and that he should return on Monday by another boat which touched at the back of the island, at a place called Loch Ranza, on Monday afternoon, and early on the following morning he and Dulcie should leave together.

He accompanied her almost all the way home, and then returned to Lamlash, where he was now staying.

As he came home over the road, he recalled with triumphant joy all that had taken place that afternoon. He had started for the meeting with some misgivings in his mind, for a day or two before he had received a letter from his sister Una, telling him that their father was much worse and that very likely he would wish him now

to return to them, in spite of having said that he hoped never to see him again. And then Maurice thought over all that might happen if he should be recalled to his home, to his mother and Alice. Very likely he would even be drawn into fixing a day for his marriage with Alice in spite of himself. If only Dulcie would save him and consent to an immediate marriage! He had half doubted her courage, and feared that her love for those in her home would weigh too heavily against him, but he had seen her again and fallen in love with her afresh, as he was always doing, and above all he had triumphed and won his cause—in five days more she was to be his wife.

How the next few days passed Dulcie scarcely knew. She went through the usual routine of duties, and did what was expected of her, but she was utterly bewildered. Perhaps if the time given her had been a good deal longer she might have retracted her word; but she now only felt what had to be done, and whilst she was privately making her preparations, which were very small and untrousseau-like, she continually told herself that it was all a dream.

On Monday evening she wrote a little note, which she intended to pin inside the kettle-holder, and she knew would not be found until breakfast-time. It was to tell those at home not to be alarmed at her absence.

On that last evening Dulcie's nerves were wrought to a great pitch of excitement, and any sudden movement or sound set her heart and pulses throbbing and beating; but a little longer she must keep up, and she counted the hours and minutes till bed-time came.

She had all her preparations finished, and everything that she meant to take with her packed in a small carpet bag. Ruby was no sooner asleep than Dulcie opened and left open the door, so that when it was time to start on her journey there should be no noise of any kind made. So there was nothing now to be done but to wait, and trust that she should not sleep.

But she fell asleep soon afterwards, and slept for some hours, awaking with a start, wondering, before she had

thoroughly collected her senses, what it was that was hanging over her ; and then hastily she looked at her watch by the gleam of the night-lamp, which she had lighted after Ruby was asleep. Half-past four ! Why, she must have slept for nearly six hours. " I knew that I would wake in time even if I did fall asleep," she said, " for when people go to sleep with the knowledge that it is imperatively necessary for them to wake at a certain hour they always do so."

In a few moments she rose and dressed herself. It was rather earlier than she had intended to rise, but she thought it better to have plenty of time to make every movement noiselessly. Cautious as she was, there would be every now and then sounds which made her anxiously watch Ruby's head on the pillow ; but Ruby slept soundly through it all. It was difficult to find different things, for the night-lamp was all the light she had. There was blank darkness outside, as she peered from the window.

At length she was quite ready. The black velveteen dress, the red cloak over it, and covering everything, a great double shawl of Royal Stuart tartan ; her hat was fastened ; and with muff in one hand and carpet-bag in the other, she stood ready.

It must be time to go. She would not even give one look at Ruby, dear old Ruby ! who lay fast asleep, little dreaming that she was losing her sister ; and resolutely turning her back on her, Dulcie went out to the staircase.

She well knew that if you trod on one particular side of the stairs adjoining the wall they would not creak, and on this side she crept down tremblingly, and fearing every moment to hear Miss Jean's door open. But she reached the hall in safety, then pausing to pin her note inside the kettle-holder, she noiselessly made her way into the kitchen, and gently unlocked the back door. It was all accomplished without hindrance or accident, and Dulcie let herself out into the darkness, closing the door behind her. Ugh ! how cold it was ; there was the same biting north wind driving into her face, bringing sleet, hail, or snow with it, she could not tell which.

She stumbled along in the dark, finding the gate with the utmost difficulty, and then out into the road and down the hill. It was a dangerous undertaking, and the only marvel was that she never fell down or lost her way.

She had nearly reached the foot of the hill, and just at the cross roads she saw a light; in another moment Maurice had met her and led her towards the carriage.

There was a waggonette and pair of horses, and a lantern on either side in front of the carriage; the driver was sitting on his box amongst Maurice Ingram's luggage; the carpet-bag was hoisted in, then Dulcie, packed in by Maurice between himself and the shelter of the driver's back.

"I hope you have lots of warm things on," he said, "for the cold is frightful, and probably in crossing the sea it will be still colder. Look here; I bought this great homespun plaid of an old woman who had made it, over at Shiskin. It will cover us both beautifully; and here is a great cosy fur rug, so we shall manage to keep ourselves warm. Now driver, on with you."

"It's going tae be an awfu' like day, sir. There is going to be snaw, and I don't know how the mercy we'll get owre the hill tae Loch Ranza."

"Drive on then; push on as hard as you can, to get as much as possible of the road over before the snow comes down."

The horses set off at a good round pace, and Dulcie, though still feeling that she was walking in her sleep, knew that she was really off, and that although she and Maurice were splendidly packed in shawls and rugs, she was flying from home and all her relations.

They were at Corrie before she had become accustomed to the fact that she was going away altogether with Maurice; then Sannox was passed, and as they began the long ascent on the other side of Sannox, the snow-flakes fell thick and fast, blinding horses and driver.

"What time does the boat leave, sir?" inquired the driver.

"Half-past eight," said Maurice.

"Well, if this snaw keeps on, I don't think we'll be there in time."

"Nonsense!" said Maurice, starting; "I tell you there must be no question about it, we *must* leave by the boat, it is life and death!"

The driver descended from his perch and walked at the horses' heads up the long ascent. But it was a slow and difficult undertaking, with many pauses and halts.

"Get on, get on," cried Maurice at length; "do you know that it is ever so much past seven?"

"We are doing our best, sir," said the driver; "we canna do mair; an' if we canna manage it, why we canna, an' that's jist a' aboot it."

"Hang you!" cried Maurice, "get up and drive your horses properly; it is all down hill now, they don't want any more leading; the carriage lamps give plenty of light, and besides, it is beginning to dawn, it will soon be light. Get up and drive on, do you hear?"

"Maurice!" whispered Dulcie, "he will never do anything while you speak to him like that; the people here are so independent and odd, that you must speak as if it were a great favour."

"I know what I am doing," said the driver, "an' if it is possible I'll be there in time for the boat; but I doubt it—I doubt that we'll manage it."

A terror came over Dulcie. "Oh, Maurice! let us walk; we could surely get on faster. Oh, think, if we should miss the boat! Oh, let us walk!"

"Stay quiet, child, you would be buried in the snow; don't be frightened, we can't miss the boat."—"Here, you fellow, just listen to reason; you shall have double your fare—anything you like—but catch that boat you must."

"Weel, weel," said the man, greatly mollified; "we will do what we can;" and he returned to his seat and gathered his reins and urged on the horses. But they were jaded by this time, and blind with the snow, like their driver, and for some little distance the stumbling, timid pace was carried on.

By-and-by Dulcie again began to fear; and Maurice looked at his watch. "By heavens!" he said, "hurry, man, hurry!"

"As sure as the Lord's abune us, we'll no reach there the morn!" and he shook his snow-covered head, and looked anxiously round.

"Lash the horses, do you hear me? I *will* be in time!" And the man making no further effort, Maurice rose, and, stretching across Dulcie, seized the whip from the driver's hands, and lashed each horse with a determined hand. The tired creatures again started forward, and each time they lagged he again urged them on, accompanied by all sorts of interjections and dismal forebodings on the part of the driver.

The hill was ended at last. "Now," said Maurice, "there is a tolerably straight road and hedges each side; it is evidently a safe, narrow lane, take your whip and drive all you know; there's just time to catch the boat even yet; if we catch it—five pounds to you!"

The snow was not so blinding as on the moors, and whether it was this or the prospect of gold, certain it was that the horses were kept to their work right earnestly; and they found that the steamer was not yet gone, although there was no time to lose.

In the darkness and the snow Dulcie and Maurice together left Arran. They crossed to Greenock, and from there took a train to Glasgow, and once there they went straight to the Catholic Church, where Maurice had been early in the morning before, and also on Christmas Day. There they were married according to the rites of the Catholic Church; and from thence they went to the Registrar's office, where they were again married.

"Is that all?" said Maurice, in some astonishment at the brevity of the ceremony.

"Yes, you are married now."

"Surely there is some mistake. I have not put the ring on."

"Oh, you can do that at any time!"

"Well, I will do it at once."

So that Dulcie had now two rings on her finger, and as they went away together she looked at them.

"I must write to Auntie Jean now," she said.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE CRYPT.

To say that there was consternation and sorrow at the house on the hill-side, would express but little what was felt there, when Dulcie's flight became known.

At first they merely thought that some strange freak had seized her to go out for a walk in the snow. That she had always been fond of snow and being out in snow storms they all knew. This morning had brought the first snow of the year. So that they were at first not so astonished at her absence as they might have been. But whilst Miss Jean was making tea that morning, the note was found inside the kettle-holder, as Dulcie had designed that it should be.

And the kettle-holder assisted at the preparation of a breakfast that was scarcely touched.

Miss Jean instantly enclosed Dulcie's note, with a few lines of her own, and sent them off to Donald Ruthven by Sandy. And almost before Sandy was home again Donald Ruthven had arrived in frantic haste and excitement.

But it was too late, there was nothing to be done. The boat had started long ago, and thanks to being on an island, there was nothing more possible till next boat-day.

"We cannot tell where they are ; we can do nothing till we hear again from her," they said, and unmindful of how the hours were passing, they sat and talked over and over again every circumstance that they knew of the case.

Ruby was utterly crushed, Miss Jean furiously angry, Donald Ruthven alternately giving free vent to all his anger, then deeply depressed and sorrowful ; but it was

Miss Bell who probably suffered more than any of them.

"If I had only told one of them—if I had only told them," she kept repeating, "this would never have come about. If Dulcie knew of that terrible curse which is on him, she would have given him up, even as Alice Young gave him up. It is all my fault. Jean was always saying that my indecision would bring ruin on us all, and it has done so in all truth. Whatever happens, when misery and misfortune come to Dulcie she will say that it is all my fault, and it is my fault. Oh ! I would give anything, —the pleasure of ever looking on Harold's face any more,—anything—everything—to recall the last week or so."

And Wednesday did bring news of Dulcie. There were three letters. There was a long letter to Ruby, in which she gave a full account of the motives that had at length caused her to come to the desperate resolution of running away. She repeated all that she had suffered from the cruel prejudices of Auntie Jean and Uncle Donald, how Maurice had come over and persuaded her to marry him now, as they would never have consent, and that they could not be happy apart. She then detailed the circumstances of the journey, and of their marriage, and next entreated Ruby to write at once to her. They were staying at the Queen's Hotel, Glasgow, to which address any letters that came for Maurice were to be forwarded.

There was a letter to Miss Jean, which ran—

"DEAR AUNTIE JEAN,—I do not know what to say except that I do not think you had any idea how much Maurice and I loved one another, or you would not have forbidden our marriage ; and it was only because we knew that we should never get consent that we have taken this step. Auntie dear, I really could not have gone back to my old life again without Maurice ; after having known him, I should not have cared one scrap for my life. We were married yesterday at the registry and at the Catholic church. I know quite well how

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angry you are, and I deserve it all ; only do try to forgive me, Auntie dear. Please do not leave off loving me because I am

“DULCIE INGRAM.”

Mr. Ruthven's letter was very short ; it was—

“DEAR UNCLE DONALD,—Forgive Dulcie.”

And Donald Ruthven did forgive her in his heart, as he had almost from the first forgiven her ; but he agreed, together with Miss Jean, that their conduct had been shameful, and that forgiveness was out of the question.

They forwarded Maurice's letters as desired, and amongst them was the letter he had been half expecting to receive ; it was from his mother, telling of the relapse in his father's illness, and that he desired to see Maurice once again before he died. She begged him to come as soon as possible, as his father was in a most precarious state.

As may be expected, this letter was a difficult one to answer, and Maurice hesitated and altered his mind a great many times before he finally answered it. And when he did so, the embarrassment he felt made him write most abruptly. He wrote to his mother, saying that he had something to tell her which would astonish and perhaps pain her ; but that it was too late now to alter anything ; he had been married a few days before. He added that he knew that his parents desired him to marry, and he himself knew that it was the best thing that could happen to him ; and that for some time he had felt that his marriage with Alice was an impossibility ; that there was no great affection on either side ; and that Alice would do far better for herself by marrying some one else. He announced his willingness to come at once to Germany if he might bring his wife, as it was of course impossible that he should leave her alone ; and he assured her that she could not help loving her, for she was the sweetest girl possible and everything that could be desired.

When the epistle was despatched, and not till then, he

told Dulcie of the letter that he had received from his mother, and of his answer.

And Dulcie was very anxious as to the result. "What will they think of me, Maurice?" she said; "I am so frightened they will never forgive us."

And whilst they were waiting for an answer, Maurice and Dulcie went about Glasgow, seeing all that there was to be seen and amusing themselves, and in spite of the anger which they felt was all round them, being wonderfully happy and joyous in the dingy old city. And Dulcie found herself possessed of pretty things and luxuries which she had scarcely even dreamt of before, and the time passed only too quickly.

The January days were short, and their daylight scanty, but Maurice and Dulcie managed to find amusement and occupation for all their time. Once they had visited the venerable old cathedral, and not until they had reached home again did Dulcie say, "Why, Maurice, we never went down into the crypt!"

"Oh, never mind," he said, "crypts are all alike."

"Indeed they are not," she said indignantly, "our Glasgow Cathedral has a crypt which is older and finer than any in the world; York Cathedral is the only one to be compared to it. You really must see it, Maurice; we must go again."

"I will go whenever you like, if you will undertake not to let a fellow get hold of me and show me round the place. You know the sort of fellow I mean; they are all alike. They are somewhat stout, wear buttoned-up coats, have pasty sort of faces, and talk through their noses as hard as they can go, and tell you an awful lot of crams about the unfortunate place they are showing off."

"I do not think that there are any in the crypt of Glasgow Cathedral."

"Happy cathedral! I never yet found anything of the kind which was not infested with these creatures; they get hold of a place and monopolise it, just as a crossing-sweeper does a crossing, till you are afraid to cross the road without forking out something. I wonder

how they first get there ; whether they apply for the place, or whether they are advertised for, and what they call themselves ? You know it is simply impossible to look at anything or enjoy anything with a fellow like that dancing at one's heels."

Three days after this conversation, when Maurice had quite forgotten it, he said to Dulcie, whilst they were walking in Buchanan Street, in the afternoon, according to general Glasgow custom, "This is rubbish, you know. I am not going to turn and walk back, or to go back on the other side and down the arcade ; I know everything that is in every shop, and all the people who are walking in the street. Here we are at the top of the hill. What shall we do ?"

"We will go to the cathedral and see the crypt," she said ; "this is the way, to the right."

"Oh, ah ! to be sure ; this crypt business, I forgot. You are going to get one of those dreadful institutions to show us round. With all my heart."

Half way there, Maurice came to a standstill, and said, "Oh, by-the-by, we were going to try and find out those cousins of my mother's this afternoon."

"We will go there another time," she said. "I somehow have a particular desire to go and see the crypt to-day ; and when I have that sort of instinct and hankering to do a thing, I like to follow the feeling."

In some places the snow lay thick and white over the streets, and in others again it had melted into blackness and mud ; and just before they reached the cathedral, some few little feathery flakes began to fall round them.

"More snow !" said Maurice. "Well, you are a strange girl ; but as it is our honeymoon, and that sort of thing, I am bound to let you have your own way ; but if I had any voice in the matter, I should say it was just about the very last day to be wandering over cathedrals and poking into crypts. I shall get cold and hungry and weary, and probably lose my temper, in which case I shall be obliged to have it out with somebody ; most likely I shall choose your man who takes us round for this. I shall contradict everything he says ; and if he

dares to disagree with me, I shall ram him down into that well—there is somebody's well in the crypt; I read it the other night in your little brown book."

"Do not make me laugh, Maurice. We are just inside the cathedral now; and I do not like to laugh here; it is too solemn and old. One can laugh anywhere; but one cannot have this feeling of veneration except one be in such a place, and there are not many such places. There, that is the way down to the crypt. But just wait one minute whilst I read what is written on this old tablet; there is no date to it, but it evidently is very old."

Written there were the words :—

Heir-ar bureit S^R
Waltir S^R Thomas S^R
Ihone S^R Robert S^R
Ihone and S^R Mathiev
By lineal descent
To vitheris Barons
and knights of the
Hovs of Minto wt
Thair vyffis Bairnes
and Bretherein.

"‘Ihone’ means John, does it not?" said Dulcie.

"Yes, I suppose so. Is it not time to go home again?"

"Why, we have scarcely come yet. Now, down these stairs."

"What! into the dark? Not if I know it."

"But I have been here before, and I know all about it. When you have been there a little while, you get so used to it that you can scarcely believe how dark it was to you when you first went down."

"Oh, well! If you insist on knowing all about everything, I suppose we must go into the jaws and mouth of something, as the six hundred did in Tennyson's poem. Don't walk me into the well at the first start off though; wait till I have become a little used to darkness and mystery."

With uncertain, cautious steps they landed on the stone flooring of the crypt, and then they were silent; for in

the dim, uncertain light their eyes were tracing out the beautiful outlines, the symmetry, and perfection of the place. Dulcie had forgotten how beautiful it was, and Maurice Ingram was utterly astonished.

He was artist enough to appreciate what he saw and felt, and he said, after a time, "I am glad you brought me to see this."

They sat on a step, and let the influence of the place creep over them. There was a strange air of death in life, of peace and rest, and of darkness in light, which set the imagination at work, suggesting the insignificance of all the petty cares that make our sum of Time. "Think of the people who have walked here," spoke Dulcie; in low tones, "under these arches, young and old; and they are all dead, leaving no trace behind them. I am sorry for them, for they did not see the world as it is now; the cities have progressed and become so grand; they did not imagine all the discoveries and inventions which we use now; and—and they did not know, Maurice."

Maurice looked round, and moved nearer to her; and leaning towards him, she continued, in the same low voice, "They have all gone, and only the cathedral arches are left, and who knows who built them? That is human fame—only our works and deeds remain; first the name of their author is questioned, then it becomes a myth; finally, only their labour stands for its day; but it comes to us as a token from kindred spirits, showing that those who went before us thought our thoughts, experienced our desires, and strove to attain the beautiful with less means to aid them than we have: such affinities bring the ages together."

Dulcie then held Maurice's hand, and looking into his face, she said: "Before I knew you, I thought my life so bright and happy; but now, when I look back to that time, it seems so colourless that I cannot understand why I was so contented in it. Now I think that the lives of these people, whose graves are all round us, must have been like mine before I knew you. Maurice, you know that German duet of Mendelssohn's which you taught

Ruby and me to sing together, 'I would that the Love I bear thee, my lips in one word could say.' I always thought that no language had a word which could express it 'all,' but I have found one word—just one English word—which does express it. Do you think you could find such a word? Let me hear what you will suggest before I tell you my word. Ah, Maurice! what is that moving there?"

"Where?"

"There!—where it is darkest and most mysterious; in the centre of the crypt. There! oh, Maurice! It was not my fancy; I am sure that there is something moving."

Maurice rose, and Dulcie immediately followed his example, as, in spite of all her admiration for the crypt, she felt no desire to be left alone in any part of it. They slowly walked towards the centre, where four pillars stand round a great tomb. It was very dusky and dim; but they just made out the dark outline of a slim, bent woman's figure resting against one of the pillars.

Dulcie was rather startled, for the place had been so utterly silent that she had not been aware of her presence until she saw her move. But the strange and silent woman was evidently equally startled by their presence, for she gave a violent start, and made two steps forward in their direction, then paused and turned away.

Maurice and Dulcie walked on, and presently they forgot the adventure, for they went round and round the crypt, looking up to the roof, at the pillars, windows, and graves, and thoroughly enjoyed it.

"The only thing that one can think of when one is perfectly happy is a desire to make others happy," said Dulcie. "To put a little sunshine into a sore heart would be just as good as building a cathedral. Is it not much lighter now, or apparently so, than when we first came down? It does not seem to be so very dark. Oh, there is that woman again! Do wait awhile; there is something the matter with her, I am sure. Do not let her see that we are watching her; pretend that you are looking at this writing."

They both bent over the well-nigh effaced words on the stone, but with great interest they watched the woman who had just before attracted them.

She was quite alone ; and although not exactly in rags, her clothes were of the poorest and most miserable description. She was entirely dressed in black. She was gaunt, thin, and bent ; but as she walked out of the centre and away from it, there was a certain grace in her walk, and even lines about the figure which made it not impossible to believe that it had once been good, or even beautiful.

"Poor creature ! how cold and poverty-stricken she must be !" muttered Dulcie, under her breath, and still they watched her.

The lonely woman had not gone many yards from the dark centre of the crypt when she paused, wrung her hands together, and then turned half round, and with her face upturned to the light, she stood still for a moment or two, whilst Dulcie thought that she had never before seen such utter misery expressed.

The face was as utterly colourless as if it had been carved in marble. In spite of the square form of the face, the nose and chin seemed pointed and thin, the cheeks were hollow, and over the deep-set eyes were square projecting brows, the eyebrows and lashes were very dark, and the eyes grey, the small amount of hair which was seen under her bonnet was thick and streaked with white. It was only for a moment or two that she paused in this position, and then she looked once more round and hastily returned to the dark centre pillars.

Dulcie involuntarily moved a pace forward, and saw her fling herself down in heedless despair on the step, careless as to the blow she must have received ; and as she lay there the poor thin body was shaken with the violence of a terrible grief.

There was a reckless abandonment about it and about her position which rung Dulcie's heart ; and after standing still for a few moments, she almost unconsciously withdrew her hand from Maurice's arm and walked a few steps in the direction of the figure.

"Dulcie ! Dulcie ! where are you going ? What are you going to do ?" said Maurice, holding her back.

"There !" she said, scarce knowing what she said.

"You can do no good. It would only be intruding ; besides she is——"

"What ?"

"A strange sort of creature, a beggar or gipsy, or something equally undesirable."

"Oh, Maurice, I must go ! Only think if I were in such dreadful trouble and nobody spoke to me, and nobody comforted me !"

"You !"

"Yes, I. She is just as much a human being as I am. I must speak to her. I only just want to say, 'What is the matter ?' "

"You really must not do anything of the kind," and Maurice, with a man's dislike to scenes, and a particular horror of being mixed up in them, endeavoured to draw Dulcie in the opposite direction, but another glance at the prostrate figure strengthened her determination, and excitedly she pulled her arm and hand free, and the next moment Maurice, to his horror, saw her fly to the centre and kneel beside the forlorn creature.

He followed her steps, and stood just behind them, with the strongest expression of dislike and disapproval of the proceedings written on his face.

No words produced any effect till Dulcie lifted one of the hands which lay, palm uppermost, on the stone. Its chill touch impressed her, and then the woman lifted her face with a long, searching, silent look at Dulcie, and as silently Dulcie held the thin hand in hers. Down went the head again on the stones, and there was a passionate, wailing, worn-out cry that was pitiful to hear.

"Raise your head. Oh, do raise your head and sit up !" said Dulcie gently. "You are so cold, and it is winter time. I want to comfort you."

She spoke for some time without producing any result. No apparent notice was taken of her words or of the tone in which they were spoken, but the hand was not withdrawn.

Dulcie was almost in despair, when the woman suddenly rose, first sitting on the step, and then looking round, and finally tottering to her feet ; she rested against one of the pillars, Dulcie standing by her, still holding her hand.

"Can I do anything?" she said. "Is your trouble anything in which I might help you?"

The weary grey eyes looked at her for the first time, and having shaken her head, she muttered, "No one can help me."

Dulcie was astonished. The voice and tones were different from those she expected to hear, and immediately she answered—

"Oh, yes, we can help one another, if only by a little sympathy, a little kindly feeling. You have both from me, but I want to do more than that for you. Could you tell me what is the matter, for I can scarcely believe that anything can be utterly hopeless?"

"No, no, I cannot speak to you. You are a stranger," and she pulled her hand away. "What right have you to speak to me?"

"The right of common humanity," said Dulcie, "and I will know more about you. Have you friends?"

"Not one."

"A home?"

"None."

"Are you poor?"

"Without a farthing."

"Has anything worse than usual happened to-day?"

"Yes."

"Has any one died?"

"I have died."

"You!"

"Yes, the only bit of me which was not dead has died to-day."

"Why did you come into the cathedral?"

"Because it was necessary that I should be here?"

"But why did you not wait till another day, when you would not have had to pay to enter?"

"Because this was the day, and the fittest way for me to spend my last farthing."

Maurice at this point came round and stood beside Dulcie. Suspiciously the woman looked at him, and then at Dulcie, till Dulcie said—

"He is my husband. We were walking round, and we saw that you were alone and in terrible grief, and we wanted to do something for you."

"You can do nothing, thank you, I am going away."

"Where are you going?" cried Dulcie, placing her hand on her arm.

"I do not know."

"But it is so cold and miserable, you must go somewhere to get warm."

"Dulcie, leave her alone; you are worrying her with your questions," said Maurice, speaking for the first time.

"Take her away," said the strange-looking woman to Maurice. "Do not let her speak to me. We have no interest, could never have one thing in common. Take her away!"

"Wait! wait!" cried Dulcie. "Your clothes are utterly miserable. I see that you are entirely without friends or money, and that you are perfectly reckless. At the same time I hear, see, and feel that you are a lady, and you shall not go wandering homeless, cold, and starving through the streets. Tell me again; is it true that you have no home and know not where you are going to?"

The woman was looking round and through the centre, apparently unheeding what was said to her.

"Oh, Maurice! can we not get a room for her somewhere? Oh, do! she cannot be wandering in the snow."

"Dulcie! Dulcie! you are crazy," he said; "how can we get her taken in when we know nothing about her? Give her money, and let her do what she pleases."

"She is desperate, Maurice. Do you not see that she is so utterly reckless that she would not know that she had money, and scarce think of using it? Give way to me this once, Maurice. See, it is getting quite dark. No one will see her walking with us." And Dulcie firmly,

took the woman's hand and led her towards the steps, Maurice walking on the other side of her, indignant and uncomfortable.

The woman was evidently frail, worn out, and ill, for her steps were feeble. Slowly they walked along the cathedral, and passed out at the great door, into the white churchyard, where the snow-flakes now were falling faster.

"Maurice, we must ask some one, or at some shop, where we can get a room for her," Dulcie said. And just then he observed a policeman at a short distance; and whilst he spoke to him Dulcie turned to her silent companion and said, "There will soon be rest and warmth—but tell me your name."

"My name!" and then there was a pause; and scarce knowing why, on looking at her face, as they stood under the lamp, Dulcie said—

"Your real name—tell me your own real name!"

There was a long pause, and then in different and sweeter tones than Dulcie had yet heard from her, she said, "Helen Murray.—Ah! how long it is since I have said that?" she added, covering her eyes with her hand.

"This way!" cried Maurice, returning to them; "the policeman is going a little way down the road with us, to show us a house where we can get a room for her."

They were conducted to a small baker's shop, wherein they found a pleasant-looking woman, who had a great deal to say for herself and on things in general. Maurice was furnished with a chair in the shop, where he remained, feeling more ill-used than he had ever felt in his life before, whilst Dulcie followed the landlady, with the silent stranger, into a queer little three-cornered room.

"Make a fire, Mrs. Smith," said Dulcie; "and give her something to eat. Go and see about some tea at once."

No sooner had she gone than Dulcie added, "And now I must go; but I am coming to see you to-morrow morning. Try not to think of the crypt—only try to eat and sleep. Good night, Helen Murray."

The weary grey eyes once more looked into Dulcie's

face, and she took her hand and kissed it ; and with an utterly spent, exhausted look, she lay back in her chair.

Before leaving the house Dulcie told the landlady all that she knew of the stranger, and begged kindness and care for her, and that she would provide all that was necessary for her, and that they would return to see after her on the following day.

Maurice and Dulcie talked of nothing else all the way home.

"What is her name?" said Maurice.

"Helen Murray."

"Is she married?"

"I do not know."

"Had she a wedding-ring on?"

"No."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"AFTER LIFE'S FEVER."

MAURICE and Dulcie dined that evening as usual at the table d'hôte at their hotel. Dulcie was very silent and preoccupied, and Maurice got up a conversation with his next neighbour on the other side.

When dinner was over, and Dulcie rose to leave the room, Maurice said to her, "I shall come up by-and-by ; but I am going now to have a cigar with the fellow who sat next to me at dinner ; he is a decent sort of fellow, and has travelled, and has plenty to say for himself."

And Dulcie, sitting alone with a book in her hand, found her attention straying from it, and her mind full of Helen Murray, whilst her imagination suggested every possible incident which could have made up the pitiful life history.

The next morning, immediately after breakfast, Dulcie expressed a strong desire to set off on her expedition to the little baker's shop, whither she should journey alone, telling Maurice that he could come and fetch her at luncheon time.

Leaving him to his own devices, she hurried away, bent upon reaching the forlorn woman with as little delay as possible.

The first that she heard on entering the shop, was that the stranger had been so ill that they had had to send for a doctor, doubting whether she would live through the night.

Troubled and sorrowful, Dulcie hastened upstairs to the odd little three-cornered room. There she found the white, weary face, which she had had in her mind's eye since she had left it the night before, now lying on the pillows, which were no whiter than the face. In the morning light it looked more spent and exhausted than in the gaslight of the night before, or in the dusky gloom of the crypt. Dulcie had never before seen any one seriously ill, but now she instinctively felt that death was very near at hand.

She smiled faintly as Dulcie came in; and going up beside her, Dulcie sat down, saying gently, "You remember me? I am your friend." There was no answer. But the large grey eyes looked straight before them. So she went on, "Helen Murray, look at me; turn your eyes from the door—think about me, remember that I am your friend. What can I do for you? I never felt such interest in any one as I feel in you. I would do anything for you. Wont you speak to me? Poor thing, I am so sorry that you are so ill! I hear that you were worse after I left you."

"I will speak by-and by," Dulcie caught, spoken in low, feeble tones.

So there was nothing for it but to sit beside her, and to give her now and then small nourishments which Mrs. Smith brought in, and these by the doctor's advice. By-and-by the doctor himself came, and from him Dulcie gathered that the sick woman could not last long.

Then came Maurice. And Dulcie entreated him to leave her where she was until dinner time.

"I cannot leave you in a place like this," he said. "It is the most unfortunate affair altogether. Besides, it is

not wholesome to be boxed up in a cupboard with a sick person. You must come back with me."

"But, Maurice, the poor woman has acute inflammation of the lungs; she will not live more than twenty-four hours, the doctor says, if that. Let me be with her, just for a little while, she may wish to say something, and she has no friend in the world. There, Maurice, I see that you will let me remain. I am afraid you will be dull. What shall you do?"

"It is a great nuisance," he said. "I shall look up that fellow I made acquaintance with last night. He is not at all a bad sort. I did not know that Americans were so gentlemanly."

With some compunction Dulcie watched him go, and slowly returned to her invalid. Helen Murray had turned on her pillow, and was restlessly watching the door. As Dulcie entered, she moved her hand in her direction, and said—

"I was afraid that you had gone."

"No; I am going to stay with you till the evening; my husband will come then and fetch me."

"Why do you stay with me? I am nothing to you. I never did good to any one. I have done much harm though—harm to many, but most to myself. But I know why you come to me. You are so young, so beautiful, and so happy; and it is out of the full tide of your happiness that a generosity to do some good arises; and you have done some good, for you have placed me on a bed to die; and in spite of all and everything that has passed, it is better that Helen Murray should not die in the streets."

"You never recognise that the one feeling I wish you to have for me is that I am your friend," said Dulcie.

"I cannot feel such things now; all feeling has died out of me. I would not even let you say that to me, but that I shall soon be dead, and it will signify nothing what you have spoken to me. If you knew all my history you would not now sit there and hold my hand."

"I should do so," said Dulcie, "if you were the very worst, the most degraded, and I knew it. I should have

knelt beside you yesterday, and I should sit here now. But when I look at your eyes and brow and mouth, I see what there is in you, and that to be as you are now you must have passed through a terrible furnace ; for flames, when they gather round an object, track and follow it up with their cruel, searching, forked tongues, and I know that the fire which scathed you must have entered into your very soul !”

“ You are right—you are right !” she said. “ I thought that you were too bright—too happy to have thought of life’s lessons. I will tell you some things about myself. There is no time, and I have no strength to say much. I was born into a good position in the world, with friends and comforts round me ; my life was happy—was like yours—till—till a day came.”

“ Till you loved,” whispered Dulcie.

“ Till then. Many men had crossed my path, had loved me, but had been of no account in my life. Is it not always so, that one man is the turning-point in a woman’s life ?”

“ Always !” spoke Dulcie eagerly.

“ His name was Philip North,” she continued. “ I met him at the house of a connexion of ours. I instinctively felt from the very first that this man would make or mar my life. I fought against this feeling till I found that he had felt the same with regard to me ; and then followed my brightest, best time. Ah me ! it is hard that golden days fly away, that we cannot grasp our own happiness ; our time here is so short, yet we will not let ourselves be happy, we will not let others be happy. There was a woman, who was more beautiful than I was, who loved Philip North. All men are weak and unstable. I believe that he really loved me best ; but he was flattered by her undisguised love and admiration for him. She boasted to me of his words to her ; she would attract him from my side. She insinuated that he would gladly be free of his engagement to me ; and, in the heat of anger, I wrote to him, giving him back his freedom, and harshly upbraiding him. He sent a message by *her*, to beg me to see him, and this goaded me afresh to write a

more harsh and angry letter than the first had been, and, when he wrote to me, I returned him his letter unopened. After this, when I heard that nothing more had come of their friendship, I repented, and asked myself whether I might not have judged them both hastily; for I had been so sure of his love, and where she, Ellen Morrison, was concerned, my judgment was distorted; for I was jealous of her beauty, jealous of the effect it might have on him. So I wrote to him again, such a letter as a woman only writes when she really loves. We were all in Glasgow at that time, and I appointed a day to meet him again. I had been with him into the crypt of the cathedral the first day that we had met, and I said that I should like there to see him again. I went at the day and hour I had mentioned; and—pity me—he did not come."

"Poor Helen—poor thing!"

"But I still felt that I must see him; and, once more, I wrote. Pride was gone; when love comes in that way, pride goes. I wrote, from my full heart, a letter that should have brought him, whilst he had feet and limbs to carry him, or a human heart with one warm living spark in it. I said, in the end of it, that if I did not see his face or hear his voice before then, I should be in the crypt again on that day five years, and, if he failed then to come, that I should be utterly reckless with my life; and again, five years after that, on the tenth anniversary of that day, I should be there at the day and hour. That would be the last time; if he came not then—that I should die."

"Hush!" cried Dulcie, "say no more. I see it all. Oh, do not tell me about it in words!"

"Every word, every letter, has been carried out. I have never seen his face or heard his voice; the tenth anniversary is passed. I am dying. All feeling in me died yesterday; till then, even in my hardened, stone-like heart, I think there was one scrap of hope—till yesterday."

The invalid was very weak and feeble when she had ended her tale, and Dulcie could only just catch her words, spoken as they were in broken gasps. Dulcie

was more affected by the scene than she had ever before been affected by anything; and when Maurice came to fetch her, she was very silent and depressed; sorrowful because Helen Murray had scarce noticed her, or bid farewell to her; all feeling seemed to be, as she herself had said—dead.

"I am afraid that you have been dull," she said to Maurice, as they were entering the hotel.

"Horrid, stupid day! but this afternoon I went out with that American chap. I say, would you mind it if he came up and had breakfast with us to-morrow? I am sure you would like him. I shall introduce you to him at table-d'hôte to-night."

In a dreamy, preoccupied manner, Dulcie assented, taking not much interest in the tall, bearded American when he was introduced to her. It crossed her once or twice that he was a pleasant man, but, at the same time, with something strange in his manner; something eager, excitable, and restless; but she answered this to herself by saying "he is an American."

The next morning he took breakfast with them, and Dulcie tried to shake off her despondency, caused by the conversation of the day before, when, before the meal was ended, a note was brought to her from Mrs. Smith.

"What is the matter?" said Maurice, watching her face.

"Oh, Maurice, Maurice! she is dead—she died at day-break this morning!"

"Who is dead?"

"The poor woman we found in the crypt—Helen Murray."

The American started from his chair, and very much astonished Maurice by the way in which he said, "Helen Murray!—what Helen Murray?"

"I know nothing about her," said Maurice shortly.

"I will tell you," said Dulcie, tearfully. "She went into the cathedral crypt to meet some one she loved. He never came, and she broke her heart. She had waited ten years for him, and her name was Helen Murray. She has not a friend in the world."

The stranger's face was white, with a grey ashen hue, and going up to Dulcie, he gasped, "Tell me!—take me to her!—where?"

"Ah!" cried Dulcie, as a sudden idea came over her. "Your name is Mr. North—you are Philip North!"

"I am Philip North."

"Maurice, it is he!"

Maurice had heard the tale from Dulcie, therefore he at once understood the strange state of things.

"Take me to her," he repeated.

"Let me come too, Maurice! do let me come!"

Firmly and determinedly Maurice insisted on Dulcie's remaining behind at the hotel, whilst he accompanied Philip North to the little baker's shop, where Helen Murray lay dead.

Dulcie, filled with grief and impatience thought that they would never return; and finally Maurice alone came back, and in answer to her one question he said, with a voice which showed that he had been moved, "It was she. I left him alone there. I never knew anything so dreadful; I never saw a man so upset."

Dulcie waited and watched for Philip North's return, assuring Maurice that she could not do or think of anything till he had been in some way comforted. And before the evening was over Philip North, with a changed, shaken face, was sitting between them, adding his mite to the forlorn tale.

"If you could but have seen her young and beautiful!" he said. "I only loved her; I never thought of any one else. Ellen Morrison kept her letters from reaching me; she made all the mischief between us. During the last six months she was dying, and she wrote and told me of these letters which she had destroyed, and of the meeting which was proposed in them; she told me, as near as she could, the dates of them. And I came over to Scotland. I had been utterly unable to trace my lost love in any way; but when I heard of these appointments, some faint ray of hope came to me. The tenth anniversary was near at hand, and I determined, on the slight chance, to go at the appointed time. I landed the

day before yesterday, and the appointed time was, I understood, to-morrow; but even yesterday, after I had left your husband, I went to see the place again; to-day I should have gone again—but she did not live till the day.”

“The appointed day was the day before yesterday,” spoke Dulcie.

“Betrayed! cheated to the last!” he cried. “It is maddening to think over; our two lives ruined, spoilt, lost! What poet is it who says, ‘the world is full of might-have-beens?’ Life ‘might-have-been’ all perfect, all beautiful for us, and we missed it.”

He thanked Dulcie and Maurice for all that they had done, and added that as soon as Helen Murray was buried, he should return to America; that life was a dreary waste—a desert with a dim horizon.

* * * * *

About ten days after the sending of Maurice's letter, when they were half doubting whether there would be an answer at all, a telegram arrived from Germany. Maurice tore it open, and read,—“Come at once, and bring your wife with you.”

Maurice sent back an answer by the wires,—“We leave for Germany by the first train in the morning.”

The answer had been long in coming; but when it did come it more than fulfilled their utmost hopes. Still they knew not what might be awaiting their arrival, and take it as they would, in spite of their entire happiness in one another, that journey to Germany was a most anxious one.

Dulcie had never, since her journey from India, been abroad, and everything was new and greatly interesting, and she was constantly wishing for Ruby, or wondering what Auntie Bell or Auntie Jean would say to this or that. Maurice was much amused and interested in her remarks, and, instead of the journey being a fatiguing one, he found that under some circumstances even travelling could be made enjoyable and delightful, and he declared to himself that each day he was learning to love her more.

At Cologne they paused, sending a letter on before to announce the train by which they should arrive on the following day.

It was a dark, cold winter's day, and it was partly the cold and partly fear which made Dulcie shiver as she took her place in the train which was to convey them from Cologne to Lorch, where they were to change for Handorf. For she was terribly frightened of Maurice's relations, and what they would think of her and say to her. Even her own relatives were so bitterly offended that, with the exception of Ruby, they had taken no notice of her or her letters, which remained unanswered; what then would utter strangers say to her? "Maurice," she said, taking tight hold of his hand as they were on their road from Lorch to Handorf, "I do feel so dreadfully frightened; promise that you will not leave me alone with any of them, at any rate for a long time to come."

"Silly child," he said, "you object to being eaten up," and he laughed; but in spite of the laugh he was not devoid of a great deal of anxiety, much more anxiety than even Dulcie felt.

The short afternoon was drawing in quickly as they got out of the train, and the first thing Maurice saw, was one of the home servants waiting at the station. He immediately recognised Maurice; and coming up and touching his cap, merely said, "Luggage, sir?"

"I will show you, John. How are they all?"

"Master, about the same, sir; the rest are well." And whilst John collected the luggage, he did not miss an opportunity when he thought he could get another peep at Dulcie without being detected in the act.

That the young master had "got married" was well known amongst the servants; and considerable curiosity was felt on the subject. His engagement to Alice, although kept a secret, was, like most secrets, somehow known to the domestics; and now that he should have been married to another young woman, without their knowing anything about it, "no row nor nothing," as John said; whether he had adhered to even the golden

old rule "of being off with the old love before he was on with the new," was unknown to them, a mystery from beginning to end, and naturally enough they felt sorely aggrieved; and John had already given his opinion that he couldn't say he quite liked the look of things.

And yet John had been wrong when he had given his opinion that there "had been no row nor nothing" about it; the news of Maurice's marriage had come with a shock as of an earthquake, or a bomb-shell falling in the midst of them, and the house had shaken to its very foundations. Mrs. Ingram, in the flush of her first wrath, had utterly denounced Maurice, and refused ever to see him again, or hear his name mentioned. And it was Una who joined in her mother's torrent of bitter words, for Alice was silent. How she felt, or what she thought of Maurice's behaviour they could but guess.

It was the sick man who first spoke for Maurice—he who had most sternly denounced him but a short time since. But he felt that his time among them would be short, and in spite of everything he was hungering to see Maurice again. He called Alice to him, and told her not to grieve and waste her thoughts on one who was so little worthy, and to forget him whilst she had yet youth and strength.

To his wife he said, "Laura, we have forgiven him so many times, that once more counts but little. I have been forgiving him all his life, and only while it seemed that a curse was following him did I give him up in utter despair. I must see him again, and I will not die holding him unforgiven. You know how many times we have decided that marriage was the one chance for him, and although he has done us all a great wrong in his marriage, we will yet pray that it may keep him in the right road. Wife, he has done a grievous wrong to Alice; but may be he has done a greater wrong to this young creature that he has married. Do you think that he has married her leaving her in ignorance—do you think that he has not told her the reason of his exile?"

"I cannot tell, Maurice."

"If she be ignorant, she must be told ; she must be put on her guard for her own sake and his."

For a week they argued the matter amongst themselves, and then they yielded the matter to the sick man's desire ; and they sent for Maurice and his wife. And the sick man was the only one to whom their presence would not be a trial and a pain.

Mr. Ingram told his wife during the time that Maurice and Dulcie were on their journey, that if he found that she knew nothing of the terrible secret, he himself, weak and dying as he was, should tell her, and that she must be left alone with him for this purpose. Then he fell to wondering what his son's bride was like, and he felt that with one searching look he should be able to tell whether she would prove all that a good wife might be, or whether she would be a disappointment. "If only she may be a true-hearted, good girl, loving Maurice tenderly, I will forgive all and everything, for I do earnestly believe that she may keep him strong."

When it was fully decided that Maurice and his wife were coming to them, Mrs. Ingram again relented, as she always had done where Maurice's faults were concerned ; and she thought over her husband's words concerning the secret that was such a weight on them ; but she thought quite differently in the matter. She argued he must know her best, and if he has not seen fit to make her acquainted with it, I think we should not either. Girls are such queer, unaccountable creatures, that it is impossible to foresee for a moment how they will take things, and it might just have a wrong effect and turn her against him, make her even hate him ; and if that came, it would simply be utter ruin, and an end to his life. It is only fair, only Christian, to give poor Maurice a chance. A chance ! how many had he not had and thrown away as they came ? "He shall not tell her," said she to herself, "never ! I will make it my business to see to that."

To Alice it would be pain and agony to be together with Maurice and his wife. For some time a conviction had been in her mind that all was not right between

herself and Maurice, and that time, to which **they all** trusted, would never bring their union. She had felt this constantly, and each time had shut it out, refusing to listen to the truth, even whilst it was battering upon the door. But here it was, come suddenly and unawares, as trouble does come. "If only they had given her time, but a little more time, when she could have got accustomed to the strangeness of what was ringing in her ears ; got accustomed to remember that she had lost Maurice for ever and aye ; got accustomed to know that he was married to another !"

And she made them one and all promise that they would never reveal to Maurice's wife his previous engagement to her.

"Perhaps she knows of it," they said.

"No, I should not think he has told her, or she would not have married him ; if he has, of course we cannot help it ; but if not, promise you will keep my secret."

They promised her this, as they would have promised anything that she asked of them. They knew that she was suffering, and the least they could do was to honour her wishes.

Una was so young that her thoughts and opinions on the matter took as yet no very distinct form, and she changed her opinions very constantly. It had always been greatly distasteful to her to think of the marriage of Maurice and Alice. She felt both jealousy and dislike of her, and thought her in no way worthy of him ; but now that a stranger had suddenly stepped in, Una found that this was equally distasteful. They had all been treated slightly, and Una would greatly have preferred to know all about her future sister, and to give her opinion freely on everything connected with her before a marriage should take place.

But it was too late, and they could do nothing now but wait, wonder, and trust.

And the family gathered together in the sitting-room ; neglecting to order lamps as the darkness began to gather, they could only draw about the cheerless black stove, and wait silently for the sound of wheels—for

John had gone to the station to meet them, with the only close carriage the town boasted of.

"There!" quivered Una's thin little voice.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"BONNIE BROWN HAIR."

"THIS place is just like some of the out-of-the-way little old towns in Scotland," Dulcie had said, as they drove through the streets of Handorf.

Maurice did not answer, he was looking from the windows of the carriage, lost in thought. Now that each step was bringing him nearer, and a few minutes more must bring him face to face with his people, he felt more keenly than ever what an utterly rash step he had taken. They had all parted many months before, more in deep distress than anger, and he was engaged to Alice; now it was his business to introduce his wife to Alice.

Dulcie saw that he was anxious, and could only steal her hand in his and wish for Ruby. She often wished for her, particularly when she was uncertain about anything and did not know exactly what to do. And now, if she and Ruby could have gone to meet the Ingrams together, she felt that she could have faced any number of Ingrams.

They drew up before a large, wide, old stone entrance. The outer doors of the hotel stood open, and Dulcie, on getting out of the carriage, wondered whether any of them were watching from the windows. And when she and Maurice stepped into the hall, she said to herself, "If any one had been coming to us at home, we should all have been down at the hall door to meet them."

John hastily dropped the luggage, and flew forward to guide them upstairs, and as he trotted on before them he said that he was going to do things properly—bride coming home and all; besides that, he determined not to be out of the meeting, but to see and hear whatever was to be seen and heard at the interesting interview.

"Mr. and Mrs.-Maurice Ingram!" shouted John into the great dusky room, as if he had been ushering in guests at a dinner-party.

And then there was some confusion, the three dusky figures round the stove came forward to meet the two who were entering; and the greeting, which had looked so formidable in the distance, was over and finished so very quickly. Maurice was first welcomed, and then Dulcie was introduced; and, after something of a pause and hesitation, kissed by the three indistinct figures. And then they all heard John inquiring whether they would like the lamps brought in. They then offered to take Dulcie to her room, in order to dress for dinner; and she touched Maurice's hand, to remind him of her desire not to be left alone with his dreaded relations. Things had passed off pleasantly on the whole, and Maurice smiled to himself at Dulcie's reminder, and together they all left the room.

"Maurice, is it all right?" she said, as soon as they were alone. "Are they angry with us, or going to be good to us?"

"Oh, all right," he said.

"Maurice," again, "they do not know that I am not a Catholic, do they? Will they all cross themselves when they are going to begin dinner, or watch to see whether I do the same, and will there be anything else to tell them that I am not a Catholic? What a pity to start by making them all angry afresh. I wish Ruby were here."

"Things will shape themselves somehow. Do not worry your wonderful little old head," said he.

In spite of its being proverbial that ladies take longer to dress themselves than gentlemen, it is by no means true; and when Dulcie was ready to return to the large dusky sitting-room, she waited long and patiently for Maurice, for to enter alone would simply have been an impossibility to her.

The dusky sitting-room had since been converted to a blaze of light by John and his many lamps, and to betoken their readiness for dinner Mrs. Ingram, Una,

and Alice were arrayed in light silks, laces, and ornaments, and this sight gave Dulcie her first shock, as the door was opened to admit her and Maurice, for in the quiet country life which she had lived it was not the custom to dress in this fashion for an evening at home, and yet it would have been impossible for her to have looked better than she did. She appeared in a very delicate grey dress, trimmed with black velvet, her hair—by Maurice's express desire—still worn the old fashion, hanging long and beautiful down her back, and tied up into a queer little top-knot on her head with a bright crimson ribbon. Probably she had never looked so pretty in her life as when Maurice led her into the large old sitting-room.

She looked very young and girlish as she came in on Maurice's arm, and Mrs. Ingram said to herself, "She is a lovely girl; really one does not often see such a fine handsome couple."

Alice looked up from her work, and said to herself, "She is far prettier than I am; no wonder he could not keep faithful; it is almost impossible at any time for men to keep faithful."

They found Dulcie a seat, and then began asking questions about their journey, which Dulcie did her best to answer, feeling the while that three people's eyes were "eating her up" at the same time, as she afterwards said to Maurice.

It was of course natural that they should look at her a great deal, and they all placed themselves where they thought they could best look at her; even John had aided their designs by adding two brilliantly burning lamps to the usual number, and gradually they found fresh things to admire in her; her complexion was so pretty, and then they saw that her eyes were lovely, and presently when Maurice made them all laugh by relating a funny thing that had happened to them on their journey, they saw the dimples which Maurice admired so much. So that by the time that John came in to say the dinner was ready, they had all agreed on one point, that Maurice had married her for her beauty.

Alice thought her dress somewhat strange and inappropriate for dinner and evening wear, and wondered that she should have worn it, in spite of its becomingness; and Una thought "how strangely she wears her hair, but of course she has it like that to show how long and curly it is."

The dinner was a trial to Dulcie, but by the time it was over she was getting used to being stared at, and she said to herself, "Wont I stare at them to-morrow!"

"Maurice," said Mrs. Ingram, "I will go and see how your father is, and whether it will be advisable for him to see you to-night or not till to-morrow morning." So that Maurice remained in the dining-room, and Dulcie followed Una and Alice to the sitting-room.

"What a pity it is," she said, "not to have a cheerful fire to go to, and sit cosily round."

"Do you feel the room cold?" inquired Alice.

"It is always cold going from one room to the other."

"I should not have thought that you would have found anything cold after Scotland," remarked Una.

"Have you ever been to Scotland?" inquired Dulcie.

"No."

"Well, I have never been to Germany before, and I certainly feel the cold much more here than at home. The really cold weather only began just about the time we were married."

"How long have you been married?" said Una.

"Nearly three weeks," was the answer, and then a silence fell over them, broken by-and-by by the door opening and some one entering.

Dulcie looked up; there stood a tall, thin, stooping figure, a man in a long black coat, with a long face, long nose, and grey hair. "A minister," thought Dulcie. "Oh, no, by-the-by, it can't be; he must be a what you call it—a priest. Oh, dear, what shall I do! What a mercy that Auntie Jean is not here!"

"This is our friend, Father O'Brian," said Alice. "Father O'Brian, this is Maurice's wife."

He advanced without a smile on his long face, and extended to her a hand which was so long and thin that as

he took her nice little soft warm hand, his own bony cold fingers met and passed each other at the other side.

She blushed almost painfully, then returned to the black cheerless stove to try and remove the chill her hand had received.

"I hope you have had a pleasant journey," said he, still standing.

"Thank you, we enjoyed our journey very much," and then it occurred to her that it was not the proper thing to have enjoyed a journey whilst Maurice's father lay dying, and whilst everybody was so angry with them, and she hastily added, "at least as well as could be expected," and then she thought "he has worse eyes for staring than any of them that I have seen yet, and he pretends that he does not care a bit, and I know that he is hating me all the time."

"I thought I should find Maurice here," he said. "I wish to take him to his father."

"He is in the dining-room," said Una.

"Then I will go to him," and the thin, tall, stooping man glided with his slow, noiseless step from the room.

"Well," thought Dulcie, watching the door shut, "priests are certainly not like the rest of the world. I never met anybody who made me feel like that before."

"Are there any more priests staying with you?" she inquired of Alice.

Una and Alice stared at her. "No," said Alice; while Una added, "I say, are you not a member of The Church?"

"What is The Church?" said Dulcie.

"Why the Catholic Church, of course."

And then Dulcie put a brave face on the matter, and said, "No, I was baptised into the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, I have no godfathers and godmothers, and I have not been confirmed; but our ministers dress something like yours—I mean priests."

"We thought that perhaps you were not a Catholic," said Una. "I wonder what Father O'Brian will say. I am sure I do not know how we shall manage."

"Oh, do not trouble your head about us. Maurice and I manage very well, thank you," said Dulcie, who did not appreciate this idea of somebody else managing matters between her and Maurice.

"Well," continued Una, "I hope you will; but there are so many difficulties and unpleasantnesses connected with mixed marriages."

"Horrid little spiteful thing," thought Dulcie. However, she merely said to Alice, "You are not a Catholic, I understand."

"Yes, I am a Catholic, heart and soul, as I have always been; only I am prevented from being received into the Church until I am one-and-twenty; but that is only three weeks off now."

"Well, you must be at all events accustomed to having some one not of your Church with you," said Dulcie to Una.

"Ah, but we always knew that Alice would belong to our Church as soon as she could."

"Well, I shall never turn Catholic." This was said very decidedly, and the others felt that they should not forgive her for this.

"By-the by," said Una, "what is your name?"

"Dulcie."

"Dulcie! what a very odd name!"

"It is rather singular," said Alice, with a smile on her face.

Dulcie was somewhat irate,—must everything about her be wrong?—and she answered, "Perhaps it is rather uncommon,—I mean odd and singular,—but when a name has been given in a Scotch Church, what can you expect?"

"I did not mean that I did not admire it. It is a very pretty name," said Alice.

"Do you think Maurice has gone to see Mr. Ingram?" inquired Dulcie. "Will he be long?"

"If father be well enough to see him," said Una. "Of course it will be a trying meeting."

She had no sooner said this than the door opened again, and Maurice entered.

"Dulcie, Dulcie, I want you," he said. And she sprang up and ran to him, and he said, in an undertone, "My father insists on seeing you now ; he is very weak, and they all fear it will be too much for him ; but they are obliged to yield to him, so come."

Dulcie stood still, her heart beating, trying to gain courage. "Well, it is better to get everything over this evening," she said to herself.

And the other two sitting by the stove watched Maurice and Dulcie walk hand-in-hand out of the room.

"Well, she is excessively pretty," said Alice.

"And she thinks no end of herself," added Una.

"I wonder whether she will get him away from the Church," said Alice.

"Nonsense ; but I hate her."

In the meantime, the sick man was lying supported upon the pillows of his bed in an adjoining room.

The room was brilliantly lighted, according to his fancy, and there was every comfort and luxury about him. He had said that it was impossible to rest on a German bed, and accordingly his own bed had been sent from England and placed near the stove. As he lay back on his pillows, one hand was moving restlessly on the quilt, it closed and unclosed, and his weary sunken eyes were fixed on the thick soft curtains which hung before the door.

"Turn on that lamp, it should give more light," he said. And those waiting about him hastened to obey his wishes.

"Bring that lamp from over there and place it here, by the head of the bed. How can I see when the lamps are so scattered about the room ?"

They did as he wished, and again his eyes travelled to the red curtains, and the restless hand continued its ceaseless movement.

There was a lifting of the red curtains, and then two figures stood out before their folds. His son had returned, but the sick man's eyes rested on the young figure in silvery grey timidly advancing, holding Maurice's hand.

They came into the full light of the lamps, and Maurice said, "Father, this is Dulcie, my wife."

"Bring her here, bring her to me," he said. And he stretched out both his hands, and Dulcie put one of hers in each, as he raised himself nearly upright, to the astonishment of his wife and of the two Sisters of Mercy who were attending on him, and he looked long and earnestly but kindly and gently into her face.

But somehow his look did not disturb Dulcie as the gaze of the others had done. She felt that it was in kindness and wishing to be pleased with what he saw, and she bent down by the bed, and held her fresh rosy face towards the grey sunken one, which turned and kissed her tenderly.

Then Maurice drew up a chair and sat down beside his father and wife, and the old man again lay back on the pillows, but still holding Dulcie's hand, and still watching every line in her face.

His hours were numbered and his time was short, and yet he knew that at the eleventh hour a new-born feeling, a fresh affection, had taken up its abode in his heart. This last act of his son's had not been the disappointment that the rest of his life had been. Now, when it was well-nigh too late, he had brought comfort to his father's heart, which had been given him by his long look into Dulcie's face.

He told them to talk to him, and he made Dulcie relate the whole account of their journey; and suddenly she began to relate their marriage, and how it had come about. She told him of the difference in their religion, of the anger of her family, of her love for Maurice, and of her fear of what his people would think of her.

Long before she had finished she had completed the impression that she had begun, and had wound herself completely into the old man's heart. It was well-nigh too late, but it gave him peace and comfort at the eleventh hour.

Once or twice they begged him to let Dulcie and Maurice go, that he might rest, telling him that he should

see them again in the morning ; but he still held Dulcie's hand, and said, "Not yet."

"Maurice, what did you say her name was?" he inquired at last.

"Dulcie."

And the sick man repeated "Dulcie" once or twice to himself ; and then she became aware that the Sisters of Mercy had started, and, with Mrs. Ingram, gathered about the bed, and the hand which had held hers had let go its hold and was drawn away.

She rose in terror from her seat on the edge of the bed, and looked at Maurice.

"Come away," he said, passing his arm round her, and leading her across the room.

"What is it? Oh, Maurice, what is the matter?"

"Another seizure. He has had so many he may rally." And he led her away.

CHAPTER XXX.

"LET ME KEEP HER."

AND Mr. Ingram did rally with the power of an iron constitution. He rallied once again from the terrible seizure ; but it was some days before Dulcie saw him again, and even she, who had seen him but once, found a great change in him. He was yet weaker, and his speech less intelligible.

He was evidently pleased to see Dulcie, for he asked for her once or twice before they allowed her to come to him ; and when at last they brought her in, he pointed to a chair beside his bed, and told her to talk to him.

So Dulcie took up her place beside his bed, and leaning on it with one elbow, she talked of her old home, of Ruby and Auntie Jean, and of her daily life in the island, everything in its turn, from the sea and its storms down to Auntie Jean's chickens.

And her voice and chatter amused and interested the

sick man, and turned his attention from his own sufferings; and when they told her that she must not stay longer with him or she would tire him, as she left the room, he said to those about him, "Let her soon come back, if it does not tire her to be here. I like her to be near me. She is like a bit of sweet blooming heather culled from the moors. She seems to bring the mountains and the sea and the fresh air with her." And as he lay and thought of her and of what he had said respecting her, he knew it would be his duty to wound her cruelly.

And whilst he lay thus thinking of her, Dulcie was out with Una and Alice, improving her acquaintance with them.

"Have you been with my father again?" said Una. "I am afraid you will tire him if you stay so long. Perhaps you do not know how weak he is."

"I went at his desire," said Dulcie; "and when the nurses thought I had stayed long enough, I left him."

"The Sisters, I suppose you mean?"

"I mean the nurses. I did not know that they were sisters."

"Sisters of Mercy. But I suppose you do not know what *they* are?"

"Nurses, I suppose," said Dulcie.

"Well, there is no time to teach you everything now. Alice and I are going out for a walk; will you come with us?"

"I should like to come very much," said Dulcie, who had made up her mind to lose no opportunity of becoming better friends with them. And the trio went out together.

It was the first walk that Dulcie had taken, for since her arrival there had been continual storms of snow and rain, and they had all kept the house, partly on this account and partly because of anxiety for Mr. Ingram.

But the sun was now shining over the quaint old town, which was trying vigorously to regain its character for dryness and cheerfulness, and it was with considerable

curiosity that Dulcie peered about her on every side as they continued their walk.

It was a Sunday afternoon, and the little town was gay as it was possible to be, considering the inclemency of the weather. Dulcie was soon struck by the fact that all the shops were open, people singing and whistling about the streets, pianos evidently going merrily inside the houses, and altogether it seemed a busier, gayer day than any week-day in the town.

"Oh, look at the wooden shoes ! Oh, isn't that funny?" cried Dulcie. "I really will buy a pair and send them to Auntie Jean ; they will do for her to wear when she looks after the chickens in bad weather."

"Can you speak German?" inquired Alice.

"No, not a word."

"Dear me ; how very odd," said Una. "We all speak German. I suppose you speak French, then?"

"A little ; but nothing very wonderful of that either."

"I suppose it is difficult to get education in your island? Are there many inhabitants?"

"A few painted savages," said Dulcie.

"At any rate, it must be an odd sort of place," said Una.

"I hope she is not going to call anything else 'odd,'" thought Dulcie, "or I shall get what Auntie Bell calls 'naughty.'"

Her next impression was that people about were very ugly, and that the houses looked as if they could not possibly be what she called "cosy" within. They entered one or two Catholic churches ; they went over the town hall, and to the museum, and then it was time to hurry home to dinner. And as they went, Dulcie settled in her own mind that Glasgow was better than Handorf, and that London was better than Glasgow, but that Arran was best of all.

The walk was somewhat of a failure. Dulcie felt that they did not like her ; and it was the first time in her life that she had failed to please, and this consciousness prevented her from feeling at her ease.

"I will not go out with them again," she resolved, "unless Maurice goes too."

At the same time, Alice was saying to herself, "I daresay she thinks we are very disagreeable; but she is so different to us,—and it is difficult to be so very friendly all at once."

Maurice was watching from the hotel window for their approach. His father had again asked to see Dulcie, and Maurice was glad of it.

He congratulated himself every moment on the way that things had turned out. Even his mother had told him that they were pleased with his wife, and that she was very pretty. But it was the evident pleasure his father took in her presence, and the kind and forgiving words that he had spoken, which more than all gratified Maurice. He felt that Dulcie had done her best, and had managed to look prettier than ever before, and he was greatly pleased with her.

He saw them coming, and went down to the hall to meet them as they entered. And Alice noticed that he scarcely observed their presence. He passed his arm in Dulcie's, and walked along the hall with her, saying, "Where have you been all this time? My father has asked twice for you."

"Has he? Oh, Maurice! I will not be two minutes in taking off my things," and she ran on upstairs.

Una called out, "Maurice! do not be in such a hurry; I want to speak to you."

"By-and-by, child," he called out; "no time now," and he went up two steps at a time after Dulcie.

"He cannot leave that girl for a moment," said Una. "He goes about just like her shadow. It is perfectly absurd; but I daresay Maurice will soon tire of it, he never cares for anything long."

Alice was listening as they entered their sitting-room, and she wondered whether this were true. It could not be that she had derived comfort from Una's thoughtless words!

As Alice left the sitting-room soon after, on her way to her room, she encountered in the passage Maurice, Dulcie, and Una.

"Are you going into my father's room again?" said

Una. "You have thrown the same spells over him that you have over Maurice."

Maurice was beside Dulcie, so that she did not care for such remarks, and she gaily answered, "Have I thrown spells over you, Maurice?"

"I should think you have," he said; and without another look at Una, they passed on into Mr. Ingram's room.

The invalid was propped up on his pillows, and he welcomed Dulcie with a smile and a stretched-out hand; and as she and Maurice sat down by him, he said in feeble tones, "Maurice, I know that you love your wife, that you love her dearly; but do you think that you will always be to her the husband she should have? Will you never be neglectful?"

"If he ever ceases to love me," said Dulcie, "it will be my fault, not his."

"My child, you do not know him as I know him. Maurice, will you ever understand fully that a greater blessing than you deserve has come to you? and if you do not keep strong now——"

"Oh, no; do not speak to Maurice, speak to me, she said, "and tell me what to do to show my thankfulness for my great happiness."

"Maurice, leave me alone with her."

All at once a fear came over Maurice. What did his father wish to say to her?—why did he wish to be left alone with her? and he said, "Why should I go, father? let me stay."

"Go; I wish it."

Maurice rose reluctantly, and said, "Dulcie, you must talk to him; do not let him talk or he will tire himself;" and going out of the room, he said to one of the Sisters, who was at work in the corner, "Do not let him talk and tire himself." And then he left the room and went to search for his mother.

"Now, you are not to talk. Maurice says I am to do all the talking. What shall I tell you about? Oh, I will tell you about Auntie Bell's sketching and the fate of the white umbrella."

"You must tell me about that by-and-by, but I wish first to say some things to you, only I can speak but so slowly that you must have patience with me. Tell me why it was that your friends so decidedly opposed your marriage to Maurice."

"Because he is a Catholic."

"Was there no other reason?"

"None at all; at least I know of no other."

"Maurice had told you that he was a Catholic then some time before?"

"Yes, the very first day that he was with us, only I did not tell the others because I knew that they would be prejudiced against him for it."

"Did he ever say there was something that might stand in the way of his marriage with you?"

"No—at least—well, when he spoke first to me about our marrying, he said—I cannot quite remember."

"Try to remember and tell me."

"He said that there was a secret which might interfere with our marriage, but that he could not tell me what it was, and at the same time he did not think it right to marry me without telling me of its existence; and he asked me whether I loved him enough to marry him knowing that there was a secret between us."

"And your love for him was greater than your curiosity to know what the secret could be?"

"How could I show my love but by trusting him; it was the least I could do!"

"It was not right for him to marry you without telling you of this secret. He should have told it to you, and left you to judge whether you would take him when you had heard it."

"I should have taken him—whatever the secret. You do not know how I love Maurice, so the end would have been the same, only now, if the secret be an unpleasant one, I am spared the knowledge of it."

"But suppose for your own sake and for Maurice's sake you positively ought to know it; it is so, and I shall have to tell it to you."

"No, do not tell me, please; I would rather not know, for Maurice does not wish me to hear it."

"I cannot allow Maurice's wish to interfere; it is simply a frightful risk for you both to run——"

The red curtains were pushed aside, and Mrs. Ingram hastily entered the room. As she advanced her eyes settled themselves on Dulcie's face, and from thence travelled to her husband's. It was impossible, of course, to guess what had been said, but she whispered to Dulcie, "Go, my dear," then rearranged the pillows.

So she rose from her seat and softly passed out of the room, and presently when Mrs. Ingram had settled the pillows to her satisfaction and had moved on one side, Mr. Ingram perceived for the first time that Dulcie was gone, and he said in a weak querulous voice, "Where is she? You have sent Dulcie away."

"She has been here long enough. She will tire you if she is here so much."

"No, I like to see her and listen to her."

"Well, you must have some consideration for her. She has been in this room a good deal to-day. Have Una or Alice in for a little while."

"If they wish to come, but send her back when she is rested. She is our Maurice's wife, and in the little while that I have I wish to see and know more of her. Wife, I find it is as we suspected, Maurice has married her without telling her the reason of his exile; but he was terribly mistaken, we must risk the telling her about it; for her own sake and his she should know, and she has a love for him that is both great and strong. Surely we may trust to that to carry her across the bridge. There are girls from whom it might be advisable to withhold the truth, but those who love royally and generously, as she does, deserve at least a full confidence."

There were certain lines of strength and determination in Mrs. Ingram's face, and well the sick man knew where to look for them, and his eyes rested on her face as he spoke.

"I think you are wrong," she said, but quite gently.

"It is just on these girls who love so impetuously that we can least rely—loving 'royally and generously,' as you say, giving all that they have to give to an imaginary being who never existed. When the first intimation comes to them proving that their idol is fashioned in clay, the shock overwhelms them as it would overwhelm no humdrum commonplace person."

There was a short pause. Then seeing that the invalid was about to speak, she hastily continued—

"No, Maurice, trust me, that you are mistaken. I know more about the characters of girls than you do, and just because Dulcie's love is what it is, I fear to give it such a trial—only remember what manner of secret it is which you would tell her, and common sense will say let well alone and trust to Providence. The knowledge of it might turn her love to hate, and then—God help Maurice!"

"You are right in one sense—no, let me speak," cried the invalid eagerly, seeing that he would again be interrupted. "You are right in one sense, it is a great risk, but it is one that should be run. She must even by this time have come to know that Maurice's character is weak and unstable, if it be still unacknowledged to herself. She must feel that her own nature is the stronger one; let us tell her that he is yet weaker than she can imagine him to be, that she must give her every thought to guarding him from himself; for she may succeed, and then what a grand thing she will have done. Remember that as things now stand, she may from sheer ignorance lead him into the paths of destruction—into the jaws of death."

"Trust a little to Maurice," said his mother.

"Trust to Maurice!" repeated the sick man, with a look in his eyes and a bitter hopeless tone in his voice which made Mrs. Ingram inwardly shudder as old times and scenes were brought back to her; but with an effort she recovered herself, and added—

"Yes, he has turned over a new leaf; his life is new and fresh to him; he has an incentive to steadfastness

and strength that he never had before. I feel that his effort will not be in vain."

"Wrong, wrong !" said Mr. Ingram with all the strength and firmness that he could muster. "You are going away from the right road, and no arguments can make wrong right. That girl knows not what she has done in marrying Maurice. It may turn out either a blessing or a curse, and it is more likely to turn out a blessing if her eyes be opened and she know fairly what there be to guard against. If the danger were over and past, I would say with you 'let it rest ;' but it is not so. There is a danger over their heads which will never pass away. Maurice will move under its shadow all his days, and Dulcie, being his wife, must walk beside him there."

"Hush, hush !" cried Mrs. Ingram, holding her hand over her eyes. "Why not think, hope, pray that he has passed through the mist, and that even Dulcie's hand will lead him into the sunshine?"

"I do think, hope, pray that it may be ; but I also say that it never will be so unless she be treated with full confidence, and know that there is an enemy to deal with, and that she is now as one walking in a mist."

"There will be time to tell her if danger should threaten again."

"No, that would be too late. Wife, I say she *must* and shall hear it, and you would be the right person to tell her."

"Never ! I will never speak of it to Dulcie !"

"I will tell her then," said the sick man quietly, and closing his eyes. "I have not long to live, but I will not die leaving her in ignorance and peril."

Mrs. Ingram silently threw herself into an armchair to consider the situation in her own mind. She felt fully assured of one thing, that it would be better for the present at any rate to make no terrible disclosures to Dulcie. While the silence was yet unbroken Maurice entered the room.

"Father, how are you?" he said. "Dulcie wishes you

to know she is quite ready to come back and sit with you whenever you like."

"I should like her to come now." Mr. Ingram opened his eyes as he said this and looked brighter.

Maurice turned, and was about to go in search of Dulcie, when his mother, sitting suddenly upright in her chair, stretched out her hand, and cried "Stay!"

"What is it, mother?"

"Come back, Maurice, I have something to say to you," she said, holding one of the arms of the chair. "Your father intends to tell Dulcie of the old trouble."

"The old trouble?"

"Yes, Maurice, of *your* trouble."

A sudden and deep flush passed over Maurice's face, and stepping up to the foot of the bed, he gasped, "Tell Dulcie?"

"Yes, your father says that the danger that was once round you is now a cloud over both your heads, and that unless Dulcie knows of its existence it may descend and crush you."

"You do not speak," continued Mrs. Ingram. "I think it would be madness to tell her. She is too young to reason dispassionately; it might turn her against you. I think it too great a risk to be run."

Maurice's face had grown white as he stood at the foot of the bed, and looking up the length of it to where his father's head lay amongst the pillows, he said, after a silence, and in a low tone, "Do not tell Dulcie!"

The invalid neither moved nor stirred. There was a weary, worn-out look in his eyes, which were fixed on his son, and in firmer tones than he had before spoken, he said—

"I intend to tell Dulcie; it is the right thing to do."

"Father, what can I say to induce you not to do this? Believe me, all danger is past and over. Do not degrade me afresh in my own eyes by telling her what is needless to be told. I have buried the past; let its curse sleep. Do what you will, but keep that from her."

"It is because I cannot trust you, Maurice, that I will not keep the secret from her."

"If you tell her," cried Maurice, his face working with emotion, "you tear the ground from under my feet—you cast me back on myself."

"Do you threaten me with a return of the past?" said Mr. Ingram, sternly. "Do you mean to say you can descend so low as this? Are you Maurice Ingram, my son?"

"You drive me to say anything when you speak of telling Dulcie. She shall not hear. I will take her away to-night, back to Scotland."

"Silence, Maurice. Do not speak so excitedly, so recklessly. I cannot bear it; it wears me out: but it all tends to show that you are not altered in any way. My strength has gone, and my time is short, but my senses are yet clear, and right and wrong stand in black and white before me. I will not close my eyes to what they say."

"Give me one more chance—one last chance!" cried Maurice, dropping on his knees beside the bed. "Father! I thought you had forgiven me. Do not curse me now. Let me be happy in my marriage; let me keep her. I must have her innocent and my own. Father! think what it would be to me to see a change come over her, if it were ever so slight. If her foot loitered in coming to me, if her arms did not instinctively stretch towards me, if the love-light died out of her eyes—I have lived to win all this from her—can you wonder that I speak recklessly when you propose to tear my love from my life?"

"I propose, Maurice, to put your love on a yet firmer and more secure standing. Strong fortress though it may now seem, its foundations are in the quicksand. Grasp your nettle and be brave. The manly course is to face the truth fearlessly. Although I have no faith in you, I trust your wife. I know that there is a clear ring in the metal of her truth. She is a perfect and loving woman. Put yourself fearlessly into her hands, let her nature then follow its own instinct, and I may yet live to hear you thank me for what I have done for you. Gold is proven through fire."

"She is so young, father—our married life is yet so young. Give me a little longer!"

"Ask not a dying man for time. A little longer and I shall be away from you; and when I am gone no one will tell her. In the days that are gone I gave you time; now I must take time by the forelock. I cannot go from you leaving this state of things, taking with me the knowledge that the ruin which fell on you may fall on that innocent girl and crush her life. Was it manly of you to marry her? was it right to keep such a secret from her?"

"I scarce know; I scarce thought of it; but it is done, and—and she is happy. Who is there?"

A tap at the door made them all turn and listen. Mrs. Ingram rose from her chair, crying, "Who is there?"

In another moment Dulcie's face appeared between the red curtains which hung about the door.

"May I come in?" she said. "Maurice said he would come and tell me if I were wanted, but he was so long that I came to see after him. May I come in?"

No one answered her. Maurice rose from his knees, and Dulcie advanced into the room.

"Will you call it 'Scotch leave' if I take it now?" she asked, with a smile.

Again there was no answer, and she began to perceive that there was some restraint over them, and, half undecided as to whether she should leave the room or remain there, she put her hand on Maurice's arm, and looked questioningly into his face.

"Come near to me, dear," said Mr. Ingram; and Dulcie resumed her former position, sitting on the edge of the bed. Maurice stood at a short distance, with a frown on his face, and his eyes travelling restlessly from his father to his wife.

"It is good of you to wish to be of use to me," said the invalid, in much lower tones than he had previously spoken; and he took Dulcie's hand in one of his, and looked kindly into her face as he continued—"I am afraid that I am scarcely strong enough to-night to bear

or to say any more, but before I die I have much to say to you."

Maurice advanced a step nearer to the bedside, whilst his fingers moved restlessly. Mrs. Ingram listened breathlessly in her chair.

"Do not tire yourself by talking to-night," said Dulcie; "tell me another day what you wish to say. Let me talk to you, or read to you. But Alice and Una say I speak so *very* Scotch that they cannot understand me; and then I have never read the books which you read and would care about; and if I did not understand them I should read worse than ever. I never could read decently; no one will put up with my reading, but I will do my best."

"And I should be fully contented. I know that you would do your 'best' at all times and under all circumstances; you have been brought up in a fresh pure air amongst good people, living a simple life, with undistorted ideas of right and wrong, doing the thing which was right with single-hearted steadiness of purpose. You fresh sweet mountain bloom, you spirit of Nature, you true-hearted woman! I know that, come what may, you will do your 'best;' and what more can be said than 'she hath done what she could?'"

Dulcie was moved; she bent down and kissed the grey, worn face that looked up at her from the pillows. "I wish I had known you before; I wish you could be up and about," she said; "I should have loved you so much. I love you now. Thank you for being so kind to me; it makes me feel happier, even in Maurice's love, to know that you like me," and she rested her elbow on the bed and her face in her hand.

"I wish I had known you before," he continued, whilst his hand wandered on to her brown hair. "But I should have shown my love for you in a strange way; I should not have allowed you to marry Maurice."

Instinctively at these words she moved her head away from his hand, saying at the same time, "I know it was all very wrong, and that I ought to be sorry for behaving so badly, but I love Maurice so much that I cannot be

properly sorry. I behaved badly to you, but I behaved far worse to Auntie Jean."

"And yet you were more sinned against than sinning."

"Father!" cried Maurice.

But without noticing his interruption, Mr. Ingram continued: "Maurice behaved far worse than you did, and the least that I can do is to try and undo the wrong that he has done you. He married you——"

"Hush!" cried Maurice determinedly, "this shall not be; you promised me."

"Maurice, speak gently to your father," said Dulcie; "let him speak, and let me listen."

"You do not know what you say, Dulcie. He shall not say what he intends to say. You are my wife, and you shall not listen to him. Come away!"

"Remain!" said Mr. Ingram; "my say will be but a short one and soon over; better have it finished and ended to-night. How am I to know that I shall have another morning? Dulcie, you are my only son's wife."

"Dulcie, get up! Come away, do you hear me?" cried Maurice, much excited and seizing her hand.

"Leave go!" she said, freeing her hand from his; "I must listen to what your father wishes to say to me. Why are you so upset?—why are you so strange, Maurice? Is anything the matter?"

Mr. Ingram still held her other hand; and by this he drew her back towards him, saying, "The dying at least claim to be heard before all others; and while I yet have strength and speech I must do my duty. I say you are my only son's wife."

"Dulcie, hear me!" cried Maurice, again standing at the foot of the bed. "Am I not 'the first' with you? If I am the first, listen to me alone, and do what I tell you. I command you instantly to leave him and to come to me."

In amaze and fear, Dulcie looked into his white and trembling face; his nerves were twitching, and all the lights in the room appeared to be reflected in his great black eyes, which seemed to give back fire. On the other side, a whisper reached her ears, "Stay only one

minute." It was said in the frail, tremulous tones which told that the sand was well-nigh run through the measure, that existence was spent, and life a tale that was nearly told, that the senses held on only by a feeble tenure and were one by one loosening their grasp and letting go their hold. She knew and felt that while that voice could give meaning it should be listened to ; but her eyes went to Maurice's quivering passionate frame, and there was a silence through the room. Then, without one look in the direction whence came the frail voice, she gently loosened the detaining hand and tottered on to her feet.

Her foot did not loiter, the love-light was bright in her eyes, instinctively her arms stretched out to him, and with a little gasp she said, "Maurice, here I am !"

His arms closed round her, and he stood looking beyond her to where the grey head lay on the pillows.

Mrs. Ingram buried her face in her hands, and, through the deep silence of the room, Maurice, with his arms still round Dulcie, slowly led her away.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WHAT THE GIRLS DID.

DURING the two following days, Dulcie did not enter the sick man's room. She understood so far that the secret which he wished to tell her was identical with the first cloud which had shadowed the horizon of her love ; and she gave her word to Maurice that she would not allow his father to make her acquainted with it.

She said valiantly to herself again that she had no desire to hear it, whilst it haunted and troubled her ; but, for all that, she could not bring herself to ask Maurice to tell her the mystery.

Mr. Ingram had been so worn out and exhausted by his argument with Maurice and his desire to speak to Dulcie, that he was too weak to notice any one, and this was sufficient excuse for keeping her out of the room.

On the morning of the third day after the disturbing

scene, he appeared to be somewhat better, and Dulcie was much puzzled as to the course she should best pursue, when Alice Young rose from the breakfast-table, and announced that she was going in to see the invalid.

"I will go with you if I may," said Dulcie, with somewhat of a flush on her face, and looking round hesitatingly, as if half expecting that some one present would forbid her doing so.

Not a word was said, and they left the room together—Alice Young first, Dulcie following her. Alice Young towered grandly above Dulcie ; her form was upright and majestic, and her movements slow and graceful. She had large soft white hands, which attracted a great deal of Dulcie's attention ; for to her there was so much expression in them, no line in her face told her character more plainly than did those solemn, dignified, somewhat heavy hands.

She walked on without saying one word ; and Dulcie, walking after her, could think of nothing else but "I wonder if Alice knows the secret !" After this her eyes found out a pin in the back of Alice's collar ; it was half out, and altogether in an unsatisfactory condition ; soon it would fall out, and the discomfort to the owner of the collar would be great. Now, if Alice had been Ruby, or perhaps even anybody but herself, Dulcie's ready fingers would have remedied the matter immediately ; but she had her doubts about Alice, placed there by some subtle instinct, and, moreover, it was within the bounds of possibility that she might not only be aware of the mystery connected with Maurice, but she might be enjoying the thought that Dulcie was being kept in the dark. She therefore resolved that Alice's collar, pin, and affairs generally, might take care of themselves as far as she was concerned.

Mr. Ingram was raised on his pillows, Father O'Brian was sitting beside him, one of the Sisters of Mercy was knitting beside the stove, and there was a general air of warmth, comfort, and luxury about the room which could not fail to impress all who were in it, save him for whom it was all done. His eyes noted these things no

more; even the faces of those he loved to him were growing dim.

As footsteps sounded in the room, he turned his head, and some interest crossed his face as he watched Alice and Dulcie approach.

"You are better now, father," said Alice, bending over him, and shutting out the sight of Dulcie from him.

"I am better—I am easier;" and his eyes travelled beyond her, until Dulcie's face appeared round Alice's shoulder, and then he gently moved his hand in her direction.

Slowly Alice made room for her, saying to herself, "He did not stretch out his hand to me; he did not even look at me. It is always so with men, even when they are sick and dying; a new face and a change pleases them."

Dulcie felt very grateful to the hand which was stretched out to her; it was a token of forgiveness; and she knew that he would have been justified in withholding it altogether, had he so chosen. She knelt beside him, and, resting her head on the bed, she whispered, "I was afraid to come and see you before, not only because they told me you were too ill to see me, but because of the other night. Will you forgive me?"

"I forgave you then and there," he said; "and I loved you the better for it, for it proved your true woman's nature. If Maurice had only had you beside him in the days that are passed, his life might have told another and a better tale." Here Mr. Ingram paused, partly from weakness and partly because he became aware that Alice's calm, penetrating eyes were fixed on him; and this brought him to a recollection of the state of things that had been; of how Alice had waited, endured, and sorrowed, giving up every other thought in life save devotion to Maurice. And her effort had been in vain; her "best" had not availed; brighter days had come, Maurice was redeemed and disenthralled, and a stranger had stepped in amongst them to reap the benefit—a caressing, loving

woman with pretty ways and a sweet voice, who would prove herself not only able to win his love but to hold it.

Mr. Ingram recognised this fact ; but he was too weak to reason about it or to fight an imaginary battle for Alice ; but, after a short silence, he held out his other hand to her, whilst his eyes travelled from one to the other. "I trust that you two may be good friends," he said then ; "it will make things more bitter to you both if you cannot be ; the past is unalterable, the present is your own ; bear patiently with one another, so that the future may be bright."

A little later he said to Dulcie, "I wish I could have taken you to Hunstanleigh ; I should have liked to have seen you there and at home ; it will be very tame and dull to you after your beautiful Highland scenery. But every one will like you ; you will make many friends ; and you will make 'home' round you wherever you are."

Mrs. Ingram, Maurice, and Una were constantly in and out of the room. The two former kept a careful watch over Dulcie and the sick man ; but to all appearance he had forgotten the scene of two evenings before, as well as his desire to warn Dulcie of Maurice's weaknesses and failings. He lay gently and placidly, watching all their movements, and their endeavours to please and comfort him ; only Dulcie was now and then made aware of some little signs of tenderness, as if to testify thereby a full forgiveness. And in the full measure of his kindness she felt very undeserving of it ; for had she not pulled her hand free from his detaining clasp, turned from him, and whilst he had said "Stay," she had still gone to Maurice with the words, "Here I am."

"I think that you three girls might go out for a walk ; it is a fine, clear, frosty morning," said Mrs. Ingram.

Dulcie, Alice, and Una looked at one another, showing plainly the strong dissent which people always feel when ordered out to take a constitutional ; but Mrs. Ingram's will was law. She felt that it would be advisable to keep Dulcie as much as possible from the invalid's bedside,

and, a very short time after she had first made the suggestion, they were facing the keen frosty air in the street.

A greater contrast than they made can scarcely be conceived. Alice, tall and statuesque, apparently utterly uninterested in the world, life, and time; Dulcie bright and pretty, eager to be interested in anything and everything; and Una, slight and deformed, irritable and captious.

The snow lay thickly over all things; but in the little narrow streets of the town it was well trodden down, and they walked in a row in the middle of the road. There was some difference of opinion as to the way they should take. Dulcie wished to walk in the town to see shops and things in general, and Una desired only to get out of one of the gates of the town away from inquisitive eyes. Alice was indifferent as to where she went, what she saw or what she did, but finally did some good by suggesting as a compromise that they should go out of the town by a distant gate, which would necessitate some walk through a busy part of the town to reach it. The suggestion was acted on; and as they passed through the streets, Dulcie's eyes only noted and searched out those things fresh, strange, and foreign, which would be likely to interest and astonish Ruby in the next letter which she wrote to her.

As they drew near to the town gate the snow became less and less trodden, and as they passed through it into the wide country road, they fell into single file and walked gingerly along a pathway which was a mere suggestion. They amused and contented themselves by observing the shape of the few footmarks which had gone before them, and the ugliness thereof, flattering themselves that their own would come out well in comparison, if any later pedestrian should journey along that lone road after them. There was an utter waste and desolation of snow, in which fields and roads merged and were lost; only the bare whitened poplar trees stood in gaunt, weird lines fading in the distance into the rest of the world of snow.

"So straight! Oh, why do they make the roads in Germany without ever a turn or bend to interest one and lead one on?" said Dulcie. "Is that the spire of a church rising out of snow and distance? How unreal all things look?"

"We ought to go back. I should think we have now suffered enough from cold and damp and wretchedness to be ready to go home again," said Una, "and to be allowed to remain indoors for weeks and months."

"Could we not go as far as that uncertain church?" said Dulcie. "We could not get back by luncheon time now; that would be quite impossible; and if there be a church there must be a village, or something of the kind, where we could get something to eat. I am sure it must be very quaint and picturesque in such an out-of-the-world spot."

There was some hesitation, till Una remembered that she was hungry, and the way to the village before them was evidently shorter than going back by the way they had come would be. After this, she delayed no longer making up her mind; she led the way without more loss of time.

The village—such as it was—was at length reached, and a more lonely, desolate, dead-alive place they had never before seen. There was an utter silence over it—no one about, nothing apparently going on. Una's first question naturally enough was, "Where are we going to get something to eat?"

Alice shook her head; Dulcie was sure she did not know. Una then suggested that the best thing would be to walk through the town. They did so. The town consisted of a long thin straggling line of houses, some far apart, and some near together; the little "inn" which stood in their imagination was not to be seen, and their spirits began to descend very low in the scale. They came to a standstill, and looked round; and after some consultation Dulcie suggested that they had better apply for advice at the first house they came to. She further regretted that she was utterly useless in the matter, not having a word of German at her command.

The result of the conference was that they all three marched boldly up to an ugly green door, which was ornamented with the largest and most singular knocker that it had ever been their lot to see. They had felt awkward in approaching the house at all, but they felt still more awkward when they saw the knocker.

"Good gracious!" said Una.

No one else spoke.

The spectre, goblin, or gargoyle, or whatever the knocker called itself, was not only the very personification of darkness and mystery to an ordinary mind, but it was most appalling; and to feel that this was the only mode of communication with the inhabitants of the house made things still more trying. Dulcie very soon gave up the matter as the wildest mystery she had yet come across; but Alice and Una got in each other's way, and excited themselves over the astonishing knocker till their efforts were crowned by a brilliant success. By taking a firm grasp of its nose, and then putting a hand and arm down its throat, a sound was produced. A strange sound, as may be guessed, for it frightened them all round. It was hoped that "somebody would come."

After a long silence, the sound of wooden shoes on a stone floor was clearly heard, and then a woman opened wide the door, and stared at them.

Alice and Una immediately began their best efforts at the German language, assisting one another somewhat feebly, whilst the woman gazed stolidly at them.

Dulcie felt assured that their efforts were not brilliant, and was thankful to be saved from participation in them, so she contented herself by staring at the individual on whose kindness they were throwing themselves. She had a white face, sleepy eyes, quantities of hair pinned up by knitting-needles, which stood out round her head. She was singularly stout, and moreover she wore a dark cotton dress. Now this cotton dress impressed Dulcie very much; the pattern of it was an extraordinary great bunch of flowers and fruit, but so large that only three of the patterns appeared in the whole dress, the one coming down half a side of the body of the dress over

the shoulder, and a little bit down the arm. Dulcie was so thoroughly taken up by contemplation of this wonder of art and dressmaking, that she started to find that Alice and Una were both appealing to her, saying that there was no possible way of getting anything to eat ; what were they to do ?

They further told her that the lady of the large-patterned dress was the servant of the house, that the owners of it were away on a visit of some weeks' duration. Dulcie then suggested that there must be bread and butter and coffee in the house, and that if they could get her to understand that it would be made worth her while to take the trouble to get it for them, she could manage it.

More confabulations went on, more misunderstandings with the language. Finally Dulcie was delighted to perceive a wavering on the woman's part, and then they were admitted into a stone corridor, which was clean and well sanded over with yellow sand.

They were ushered into a square, ugly room, without rug, carpet, covering, tablecloth, or comfort of any kind, a wooden flooring with sand on it, and a long narrow window, too high up to see out of.

"How cold it is !" shivered Dulcie ; "the room feels as if it had never known a fire. Do ask her to let us go in the kitchen with her and get warm."

"In the kitchen !" said Alice, with amaze, whilst Una followed up the suggestion.

Whether the lady in the large-patterned dress understood it or not, it was difficult to tell ; but she went out of the room without a word, slamming the door after her.

"Pray do not offend her," remarked Alice, "or she may not bring the coffee and bread and butter."

Dulcie looked round the room at the hard seats, at the black cold stove, saying to herself, "Oh, for a fire ! Oh, for a Highland welcome !"

The time of waiting seemed long, and finally they began to speculate on the minds and characters of the owners of the house and the coffee and bread and butter

arrived just in time to prevent very hard and unchristian things being surmised about them.

But by the time they had eaten and drank they were much more charitably disposed. Even the lady in the large-patterned dress looked cheerful after they had settled with her for the entertainment; and as they left the house Dulcie turned for a last glance at the dress and the knocker—two things which she would have given a great deal to be able to carry away with her and to forward by the next train to Auntie Jean in Scotland.

"Oh, the church!" said Alice; "we will just look in for a moment, as it is so near at hand."

There was a path leading to it, and this way seemed to be more trodden than the other road. Silently they passed along it. Dulcie had already become accustomed to finding the churches open at all times, and to going into them when passing by.

This church was small and excessively old. The chief door was closed and locked, but they made their way round to the side where the snow was trodden, showing that others had passed that way. A small, carved old door was found, and after some pushing and persuasion they got it open; and it closed heavily behind them, leaving them inside the most exquisite and picturesque little church that they had ever seen. The walls were chiefly whitewashed, but here and there the whitewash had been scraped or had fallen away, showing rich visions of frescoes underneath. But the congregation was evidently not an art-loving one, and no further care or effort had brought the lost beauty to the light. Some of the few pews were richly carved and dark with age, others bare and new; the pulpit was quaint and massive, but propped and secured strongly together; there was one small gallery, which seemed to be slipping on to the pews below.

Alice and Una knelt in a pew, and Dulcie, seeing a small stone staircase leading to the little gallery, went upstairs, thinking that it would be pleasanter not to be under that gallery. She found her way to the front of it,

where she sat down ; and, feeling that she was surrounded by mementoes of dead days, of strange people, and of foreign religion, into which she had been brought by the changes and chances of her own life, her thoughts wandered away into dreamland, carried there by the pleasant, creeping, insidious scent of the incense.

"Dulcie, are you there?" said Una. "We must go now ; we shall not get back by daylight."

Dulcie descended the staircase, and together they found their way back to the door by which they had entered.

"Open it, Alice. What a time you are !" said Una.

"I cannot open it," said Alice.

They all tried in turn, but not one inch could they move the obstinate old door.

"Try, try ! we must get it open !" cried Dulcie ; and with vigour and determination she set to work, tugging and pulling, but with no success.

"Well, that is the end of everything," said Una, sitting down on the floor. "It is too awful to think about."

"What shall we do if we cannot open it?" said Alice. "It is beginning to get dusk now, and no one will come for hours. They will be so frightened about us at home."

"We will go round," said Dulcie, "and see if we cannot get out by any other way."

Anxiously they made a tour all round the church, vestry, and gallery, finally coming back to the side-door. They began to feel dismal.

"It is nonsense—it must be all nonsense !" cried Dulcie, vigorously. "Let me try again ; I am so strong !"

No one thought of opposing her desire, and she was freely allowed to wriggle and writhe and battle in a desperate encounter with the door, which left them all at exactly the same point as they had begun.

Dulcie's cheeks were flushed, and her hands were tired, and they all came to the same conclusion, that there was nothing for it but to "wait ;" Una remarking

with some common sense, that it was lucky that they had had coffee and bread and butter before instead of after their visit to the church.

So they waited, chafing and wearying at the delay which seemed to be so hopeless and endless, and as they grew cold and nervous their spirits went down to the lowest point, particularly when the short afternoon closed in, and a vague uncertain light crept through the church.

"I thought that Catholics were always in and out of church," said Dulcie.

"Well, there is no one to come to church here," said Alice.

"I suppose somebody will come before night," remarked Dulcie, as bravely as she could.

"I suppose so."

Una immediately after this announced that in another few moments she would be certain to fancy that she saw shadowy forms creeping about the altar and pulpit, and Dulcie requested that she would be good enough to keep it to herself, whatever she saw. And the waiting grew more hard to bear; for amongst so much old wood and building, strange sounds and unexpected noises alarmed them as darkness crept over them.

They had gone through all the stages of trying to remember who it was that had first suggested their going out, and who had proposed the direction, and who had proposed going to the church, and finally, who had last entered, and let the door close on them like the mistletoe bough business; and each in turn had been made to wish that they had not done it. All at once out of the stillness and dark, a sudden sound close behind them sent them into a frightened heap, clutching each other firmly.

The door opened as if by magic, and a little old man with a lantern entered thereby; and when he became aware of their presence he was at first rather more alarmed than they had been at his coming.

They managed to explain the situation to him, and forthwith he showed them the trick of the door, a catch

of the simplest description, which aggravated them when they understood its simplicity, as they had not thought of it.

He only added that they would know all about it in future when they visited that church ; and they said that this was quite true, each one registering at the same time a vow never again to enter it by that door or by any other.

They further asked his advice as to how they were to get back to Handorf, as they were too tired, and it was so dark, to trudge through the snow.

His business was to light the church for vespers ; but he seemed to be a delightfully friendly, good-hearted old man, and told them if they would wait whilst he went through his duties, he would think over things in the meanwhile, and by the time that candles were lighted he would give his advice.

Their one desire was to get home as hastily as possible, but evidently the only thing to be done was to wait ; and as they had served such an apprenticeship to waiting, a little more of it, under the circumstances, was no great hardship.

By the time that the candles were lighted the old man, who had a very red illused-looking little nose, told them that he had a sledge, and that a man near at hand had a horse, moreover that somebody else had a son, and that these three good things united might land them safe at Handorf.

It was with the greatest feeling of relief that they found themselves once more out in the snow, whilst the little old man with the nose talked a great deal to Alice and Una and looked a great deal at Dulcie, astonished that she said nothing.

There seemed to be further endless delay in the getting together of the three good things—sledge, horse, and boy ; and it was already evening and very dark before they were packed into a not uncomfortable sledge ; and with some old sacks round their knees to keep out some of the cold, they huddled closely together and drove off in the dark, considering which, as well as the

road, the sledge and horse were managed and got along in a masterly manner by "somebody's son."

CHAPTER XXXII.

MYSTERY AND DEATH.

At the hotel they found, as they had expected, very general consternation and alarm on their account.

Having giving orders that the boy and the horse were both to be well looked after and comforted before their return to the neighbourhood of the lone church, they went up-stairs, all talking together and trying to explain as quickly as possible the unfortunate combination of circumstances which had led to the delay.

In the reaction from all his fear and uneasiness, Maurice was thoroughly cross and sulky for the rest of the evening.

They had been unable to keep all their fears from the invalid, but no sooner had they returned than Mrs. Ingram hastened to relieve his anxiety on their account.

He was too weak to see any of them that night; only once that evening he reminded his wife that the duty he had given himself to perform yet remained undone, and that in spite of all that had happened he fully intended that Dulcie should be made aware of the secret relative to Maurice.

Mrs. Ingram was silent. She dared not disagree with him; she could only determine that the disclosure should not be made, and trust to time, chance and circumstance for aiding her resolution.

And indeed it seemed that all things would aid her, for Mr. Ingram became worse in the night, and the next day was so weak that they scarce thought that he would live through the day.

Dulcie was in and out of the room several times, and once towards evening whilst she was bending near him he whispered feebly, "They seem to try to keep you from me. Stop near me, and alone, if you can."

It was a long, trying day. Mrs. Ingram, Father O'Brian, and the Sisters were all worn out with nursing and anxiety, and it was about ten o'clock when Father O'Brian said to Mrs. Ingram, "You must go and get rest. I shall not leave him till the Sisters wake, and you are worn out."

"No, no, I cannot leave him," she said.

"Ah, but indeed you must. It will not do for all the nurses to be worn out."

"Where is Dulcie?" she said.

"Gone to bed about ten minutes ago."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite. I saw her go into her room after saying good night to Alice and Una."

"Then I will lie down for an hour or two," and she left the room in search of the rest she so sorely needed. And Father O'Brian sat reading to himself, and the sick man apparently slept.

In about an hour's time the red curtains moved, and one of the little quiet pale Sisters cautiously entered, and motioned Father O'Brian to leave the room for his turn of rest.

When he was gone the sick man by-and-by stirred, and in a scarcely audible tone said, "Is Dulcie here?"

"No. Do you wish for her?"

"Fetch her—no one else."

And scarce liking to leave him, even for a moment, the Sister softly hurried to the door of Dulcie's room and knocked, and delivered her message, and flew back to her invalid.

And in a very short time Dulcie, in a crimson dressing-gown, and her long brown hair hanging round her, appeared at the bedside. The sick man feebly stretched out his hand, and she took it and sat down on the edge of the bed without saying one word. Then the nurse gave him a stimulant, and again took her place at some little distance; Dulcie did not move or speak, and there was dead silence, save the voice of the wintry wind which was roaring through the sleeping town.

Dulcie had almost fallen asleep, when she heard a sound which recalled her to herself. She looked up quickly; the little pale sickly looking Sister in the tall white chair lay sleeping in it, the lamp-light falling white on her upturned face, and Dulcie turned to her father-in-law.

"Dulcie," she heard. And she pressed his hand and bent near to him.

"Love Maurice—never leave off, in spite of what may come," she just distinguished, but his voice was thick and difficult to understand.

"Always, and for ever; do not fear anything," she said.

"I feel, I know that—that dreadful thing——"

"There is nothing dreadful."

"It will come again."

"What is coming? Oh, do not frighten me so," and Dulcie looked round towards the nurse.

"No, listen to me, I speak of Maurice—but I have no power—I can't speak," he gasped.

"No, do not try, you tire yourself."

"And if it does come—death—it will be death."

"Ah, do not speak any more," said she in painful doubt as to whether he was wandering in his mind.

"It is your place to take care of him, now that you know it," and he started and rolled his head round, and in terror Dulcie called "Nurse."

The Sister awoke and flew to the bedside, and giving him more stimulant, she rushed off to awake the doctor and Father O'Brian.

Then Mr. Ingram stared at her, and evidently did not recognise her, for he added in a stronger tone, "Yes, some day he may marry her—but do not let Maurice laugh."

Dulcie shuddered, whilst the wind moaned without.

"There is the wind," he added. "The wind did not blow then; it was a summer evening, and Maurice lay on his face on the grass, and his head was covered with blood."

Dulcie drew her hand away from him, and was divided between the impulse to fly out of the room and intense anxiety to hear more.

"He brought disgrace on us and ruin on himself. Lift him from the grass; carry him away out of the world. His life will be a curse from now on."

He said this in a frail and feeble voice, and Dulcie knelt beside him, her face close to his, shaking with a great fear, and yet eager not to lose one word of what was being said.

"You will never cure him; never, never, it is too late."

Dulcie heard footsteps, but she did not turn round till Mrs. Ingram laid her hand on her shoulder, saying, "Get up, go away. What are you doing here?"

Her voice was abrupt, and Dulcie rose to her feet, and Mrs. Ingram, on seeing her white face, added more gently, "Go to bed, dear; he is delirious, and you can do no good. Maurice, take her away."

And Maurice, who had entered, led her from the room.

"Oh, Maurice, is it you? Are you safe? Do not leave me."

As they entered the passage Dulcie gave a great start, for a priest and white robed boys, with swinging censer and burning incense, were moving along towards the door which they were leaving.

"Oh, listen to the wind!" she said.

"You must try to sleep," he said, "for I must return to my father."

After a while Dulcie fell asleep, and slept on till the grey winter dawn stole in, when Maurice brought her the news that his father lay dead.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE OLD RED CLOAK.

A BELL is ringing.

Pealing and clanging away from a small turret over a great house.

A massive, solidly built, but somewhat sombre-looking house : it may have been the dense plantations of old trees about it, or the style of its architecture, or perhaps the cheerless light of an early spring evening, that made it appear the decidedly gloomy place which it did, in spite of its standing on the summit of a hill, and in spite of peeps of wide beautiful views through the trees, which were to be had from the upper windows.

When Dulcie first came there, nine or ten months ago, she, in pleasant conceit of her own Scottish hills, had refused to look upon the rising ground of Hunstanleigh, in the light of a hill, or to dignify it by that title ; however, as time passed on, and she became accustomed to the English scenery, she gradually, like others, fell into calling it the hill.

Time had rolled on, bringing many changes ; and it was more than a year since the body of Maurice Ingram the elder had been brought over from Germany and placed amongst his ancestors in the vault at Rolingstoke.

Since then, Mrs. Ingram, Una, and Alice had remained abroad, for Maurice had taken his father's place, and Dulcie reigned in Mrs. Ingram's stead. Dulcie had found that there was a great deal for her to learn, and some weight and responsibility resting on her shoulders ; how many times she had longed for Ruby and Auntie Jean it was impossible to say. From Maurice she speedily found that there was little help to be got, and an appeal to him for advice invariably brought the answer that she must manage things somehow, and that she would soon get accustomed to everything. And after several failures and breakdowns, which she valiantly managed to keep to herself, resolving never again to be so beaten, Dulcie began to understand the use of the reins which she had

gathered in her hands, and that she, who had been of the least consideration at home, was ruling power in this big house, and over all these servants, ay, and over Maurice too.

And gradually changes shaped themselves about her, and she imparted some of her Highland ideas unto astonished servants and gardeners.

Maurice laughed; it amused him to note the surprise which the new customs caused; and for the rest, he thought the animals thrive as well as formerly on their new food, and that the new shrubs and flowers in the garden were pretty, and that Dulcie's Scotch cook was a first-rate institution. Dulcie formed a new and large circle of friends for herself about the neighbourhood; the Ingrams had formerly visited but little, for the Catholics were few and far between, and they did not care to be intimate with those who were not Catholics.

"I suppose we shall not see so many priests about the house now," a lady who was not of the Catholic faith had once said to Dulcie during a morning call.

"Well, I do not know about that," said Dulcie. "Father O'Brian of course is very constantly here, and he really is a very nice old man, and often we have others with us to dine; you see those who have been in the habit of coming here frequently in Mr. Ingram's time, and intimate friends many were of his, I think it my duty to receive and entertain in a friendly manner; besides," said Dulcie, with some dignity, "my husband is a Catholic."

"Ah, to be sure," was the answer; and this lady made it her duty to go round and inform the neighbourhood that the priests were hanging about Hunstanleigh just the same as ever, and that according to her belief young Mrs. Ingram was in a fair way to fall into their traps and become a Catholic like the rest of the Ingrams.

But the bell has been ringing in the turret, and it announces that dinner is ready.

Within the house, in a long, lofty drawing-room with four tall old-fashioned windows in a row, there is a brilliant fire blazing, and two immense glass chandeliers

lighted by wax-lights. Near to the fire there is a low, large, blue velvet arm-chair, and sitting in this, in costly dress but with a restless worried face, is a woman young and not unhandsome, with a baby on her knee.

She has a pale, sallow complexion, a long and straight nose and black eyes, her blue-black hair coiled round her small head.

"There is the dinner-bell," cried a bright, clear voice from another part of the room. "Where can Maurice be?"

And the eyes of the lady in the blue chair left the round, plump, sleeping child, and travelled across in the direction the voice came from. In bold relief from the blue curtains stood a well-made shapely form, with the same long curling brown hair, for Dulcie still wore her hair in the old way; she was greatly changed and yet exactly the same old Dulcie of a year ago. It was not in feature or colour that the change had come; it lay more in an indescribable manner and a certain graceful dignity.

"He will be here directly," said the lady by the fire; "whatever else they keep waiting, gentlemen seldom keep the dinner waiting long."

She had scarcely said these words when Maurice entered the room. There was little or no change in him, but he certainly looked stronger than he did a year ago.

"Well, girls, are you ready?" he said. "The bell has rung, has it not?"

"I should think it had; we were wondering how much longer your royal highness meant to keep us waiting," said Dulcie.

"Well, come along. What is to become of Ingram, junior, Esquire, though?"

"Nurse always comes for him when the bell rings. Oh, here she is;" and Dulcie gently lifted her sleeping baby from her sister-in-law's knee, and delivered him over to his nurse.

A shawl was thrown over him, and nurse and child disappeared, followed to the door by Dulcie; then,

returning to the hearthrug, she added—"He has been so absurd, and so lively, it was a mercy he fell asleep at last, or poor Laura would have been quite tired out; for she would not let nurse take him away—and, just fancy Maurice, he broke her necklace," and Dulcie burst into a merry laugh as she recounted this clever feat of her son's.

"Just what I always said; he is getting more like a monkey every day. Come to dinner, girls, or the Scotch cook will be irate and set the house on fire." And Maurice, with his wife on one arm and his sister on the other, descended the broad shallow stairs.

Mrs. Chesney was Maurice Ingram's second sister. Dulcie had been introduced to all his sisters in turn, and they had each been to stay with her, and the introductions had on each side been a great success; Lady Lawrence was of course too much occupied to give much of her time to her sister-in-law, but the little they had seen of one another had been pleasant to both. Mrs. Selwyn, the youngest married one, was Maurice's favourite sister; and when she could be spared from her busy home, with or without her children, Dulcie was always pleased to have her at Hunstanleigh, and the two were the best of friends.

But it was Mrs. Chesney, the least attractive, the least popular, who had taken up the largest place in Dulcie's heart. Her married life had been a failure, her temper was hasty and hot, her husband did not understand her, and never tried to do so; he was scarcely ever at home, and she had no child to interest and amuse her. And Dulcie, in the fulness of her own happiness, felt keenly what her sister-in-law's trial must be, and she spent a great deal of her time in trying to brighten life for her.

And Mrs. Chesney, unaccustomed to all this sympathy and affection, met it readily, almost greedily, and Dulcie put up with her fits of temper, and in her own sunny manner charmed them away; but Dulcie's baby was her especial delight, and she never wearied of him, however tiresome and exacting he was; indeed, Dulcie continually asked her in mock seriousness what was the good

of her trying so hard to bring up her son properly if his aunt had made up her mind to spoil him.

At dinner-time they discussed a letter which Dulcie had that morning received from Ruby. At last she had got permission to come and stay with her; for all this long while the sisters had never met, and both had been wearying more than they could tell to see one another again; and it was Donald Ruthven who had at length prevailed upon Miss Jean to permit this visit, saying that it was not right to keep the sisters apart any longer; he had moreover volunteered to take Ruby to Hunstanleigh himself. Miss Jean vented her scorn in remarks about his probably desiring the felicity of sitting down to table with a priest, or maybe getting inside one of their churches to witness their popish mummeries. Miss Bell said these remarks made her feel quite cold all down the back, and Donald Ruthven, always keenly sensitive to Miss Jean's sarcasm, kept as much as possible out of the way whilst preparations for this wonderful visit were making.

"I am so anxious to see your sister," said Mrs. Chesney, as dinner proceeded. "Is she not very like you?"

"Ridiculously like," said Maurice. "You will never be able to tell one from the other; and as for poor Ingram, junior, Esquire, he will never know which is his mother and which isn't. Really, Dulcie, it is a downright shame to puzzle him in that way, considering his small amount of brains and all."

They all laughed, whilst Dulcie added indignantly, "Brains, indeed! Well, he has more brains than any other baby ever had."

Ruby and Uncle Donald were to arrive the next day; and Dulcie spent the chief part of the evening in a variety of preparations, which she could not and would not believe were then in perfect readiness.

Maurice and Laura were amused at her indefatigability. Maurice advised her not to tire herself, and Laura felt somewhat inclined to be jealous of the sister whose coming took up Dulcie's every thought.

"I hope it is fine," was Dulcie's first thought the next morning. "The place will look so dreary if it is a dull day."

It was useless to try to get a word on an indifferent subject from Dulcie that day. She was on her feet the whole time, trying to find something that would be the better of alteration, as Maurice said. She wondered what Ruby would say to this? or Uncle Donald say to that? At any rate, one thing was perfection, whatever else was found wanting, she decided, and this was the baby.

They could not get her out of the house either for a walk or a drive; but she was only too happy to pack them off, they said. She gave the Scotch cook, who had her full share of native belief in herself, such a talking to, that Maurice wondered how she put up with it, and decided in a foreboding voice that she would take her revenge by-and-by, and that they would all be poisoned over their dinners.

They were to arrive by a late afternoon train, and Dulcie had ordered the carriage which was to take her and Maurice to the station to meet them, to be at the door in such particularly good time, that Maurice said the only way would be to walk the horses the whole distance.

"Hullo!" said Maurice, when Dulcie appeared ready to set out for the station, "here's the jolly old red cloak again. I like that. It reminds one of old times,—sunshiny frosty mornings on the moors, and so on."

"Laura," said Dulcie, "mind you do not show them baby. I want to show him to them; so when you see or hear us coming, carry him off."

And they left Mrs. Chesney sitting smiling in her favourite blue chair; and at her feet, on the fluffy white hearthrug, sat the wonderful baby, staring wildly and vacantly with his great black eyes, and gnawing his fat fist.

"I am perfectly certain that Ingram, junior, Esquire, is an idiot," said Maurice, looking at his son, then rushing off to escape chastisement from Dulcie.

"I say," said Maurice, when they were in the carriage, "haven't you got a horrid shabby old dress on!"

"Don't you see, Maurice, it is my old black velvet dress and the red cloak; I want to appear the same Dulcie who ran away from them. I shall look comfortable and home-like in Uncle Donald's eyes, and I do not want to upset Ruby in the first moment by being grand."

Maurice had said that they should have a good two hours to wait at the station for the train to come, and they did have more than half an hour to wait. Maurice afterwards persisted in stating that it was just upon an hour.

The porters gathered on the platform, and red lights were coming along the line; and in a few minutes the train rushed into Rolingstoke Station, and the carriage doors were opened, and there was bustle and confusion; and Dulcie looked eagerly round, but could see nobody that she knew, when all at once she was touched on the shoulder, and she looked round into Uncle Donald's gladsome, well-known face.

"I knew ye—I knew ye at once by your cloak," he said, as he caught her in his arms. "Ruby said she didna think ye'd have the red cloak on, but I was right."

And close behind him was Ruby, not in the red cloak, but Ruby the same as ever in spite of that. They had found one another again at last; and holding each other by the arm, they went out of the station to the carriage, leaving Uncle Donald, Maurice, servants, porters, and luggage to manage as best they might.

Ruby and Dulcie sat side by side, staring at one another as best they could in the March evening twilight.

Then Uncle Donald bustled into the carriage, talking about everything that had happened on the journey, and continually breaking off to ask Maurice if, to see those two together again, wasn't a sight "guid for sair 'een."

They paused at the lodge, and the big gates were swung back, and they drove quickly into the black

shadows of the dense trees which stood about Hunstanleigh.

"It looks dark and eerie under the trees now, doesn't it?" said Dulcie; "but in summer, when they are in full leaf, it is so beautifully shady and cool under them."

"I've nae doubt but it's a bonnie place, if ye could see it," said Mr. Ruthven.

The entrance hall was a very large, lofty, somewhat gloomy place, but Dulcie had instituted a wide, old-fashioned fireplace in it, and as the doors were now opened, a bright welcoming blaze greeted them; and Mr. Ruthven no sooner set eyes on this than he straightway made for it, and drawing up a chair over the sombre-looking flooring of squares of black stones and white stones, he sat himself down, and holding feet and hands towards the comforting blaze, utterly refused to move until he had "got the cold out of him," as he said.

"Poor man," said Dulcie, laughingly; "I will get you some hot toddy mixed immediately."

"No, thank ye, lassie; I'll wait till after dinner, and then we will see if ye've forgotten how to mix it. The dinner will be ready immediately, I trust, for I am ravenous."

"Just immediately, uncle; in a quarter of an hour."

She then carried Ruby off to her room, poked the fire, and helped her to take off her travelling things, and hung about her doing anything for her that suggested itself; but somehow could not possibly talk naturally to her. It is always so. When people meet after long parting, the more intimate they have been, the more difficult it is to suddenly renew their intimacy.

When Ruby was nearly ready, there was a knock at the door. Dulcie went to see who it was, and found Mrs. Chesney outside, saying smilingly, "Let me in."

Dulcie introduced them and left them to make friends; and telling Mrs. Chesney to take Ruby down when she was ready, she hurried away in order to dress for dinner.

She had settled long ago what dress she should wear, and which of the baby's gorgeously embroidered dresses was most becoming to his style of beauty. In her room

she found him with his nurse awaiting her, in a white dress which stood out on end all round him. He was rolling himself about, every now and then suddenly throwing himself backwards, with the greatest desire to pitch himself somehow on to the floor. These movements were regarded with great hostility by the nurse, for they were detrimental to the beauty and stiffness of the white dress.

Dulcie laughed as he held up his arms to her, and caught him up kissing him, whilst the nurse added, "His best dress, ma'am. His pa was here just now, and he took him up all of a heap and rolled him about, and I am afraid he won't be fit to be seen after all."

By-and-by Dulcie, in a pale blue dress and the baby in her arms, entered the drawing-room, and with the greatest possible pride showed him off.

"Do you not think he is wonderful, considering he is only between three and four months old?"

"He is beautiful," said Ruby, "and his eyes are magnificent."

"Yes; and look here," added Dulcie, "do you see his nose? Wont it be handsome? Only it is so difficult to see his profile; he isn't still for a moment."

Ruby scarcely believed in the baby even yet, and stared wonderingly at him. But Uncle Donald directly took him into his arms, crushing the wonderful dress anyhow that came first, and carried him off to Mrs. Chesney's particular blue chair, and sat himself thereon, without thinking of her or anybody else, so that he could get a good look at Dulcie's baby.

He and the baby took a mutual fancy to one another, and were both so happy together that no other earthly business but dinner would have induced Uncle Donald to give him up.

After dinner, before the ladies had left the room, Dulcie had a kettle brought in, and testified to Uncle Donald that she had not yet forgotten how the "guid auld Hielan' toddy" was concocted.

"Make another like glass for Maurice," he said.

"He never takes anything, uncle; it is no use."

"Man ! d'ye never take a glass of toddy ?"

"No," said Maurice.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TOGETHER, YET APART.

"RUBY, have you got the red cloak with you ?" inquired Dulcie the next morning.

"Yes."

"Then just put it on, and we will go out as we used to do ages ago."

Mrs. Chesney well knew that they desired to be alone, that they must have a great deal to talk about, so she remained at home to continue her favourite occupation of looking after the baby.

This morning, however, she found that her office was likely to be disputed; for Mr. Ruthven, who was always somewhat of a stay-at-home, had fully made up his mind to devote any spare time to the amusement of playing with the baby. And they had him brought into a pretty little chintz-covered cozy room, where Dulcie usually spent her mornings, and amused themselves with him during the time that he was neither sleeping nor out for an airing.

Here Maurice found them shortly before luncheon-time, and he afterwards reported to Dulcie that they were ready to eat one another from jealousy ; whilst Ingram, junior, Esquire, was lording it over them, and getting everything his own way. Maurice further advised Dulcie to see that this did not often happen, or the end of Mrs. Chesney and Mr. Ruthven might be that of the Kilkenny cats.

Dulcie took Ruby all round the gardens and shrubberies, pointed out to her the boundaries of the estate, and then away in the distance, where they had some more land. She showed off the animals and everything in turn which would amuse or interest her, and asked in turn numberless questions about her old home and

friends. She heard that Auntie Bell had quite altered and changed during the past year.

"She is so low-spirited and down-hearted. I believe there is something worrying her, only I cannot tell what it is. At first I used to think that it was your marriage that had upset her, for she talked of nothing else, and was perfectly miserable about it, and kept on saying that it was all her fault. But that, of course, was nonsense; and surely she would have got accustomed to your marriage by this time, so that cannot be the reason," said Ruby.

"Tell me about Auntie Jean," said Dulcie. "What does she say about me? Tell me all about everything, from the very first; and is she still angry with me? What has she said about baby? You cannot think how I wish that she would write to me."

It was difficult to answer all these questions at once; and there was but little to tell, for Miss Jean never talked very much, and the more keenly she felt on a subject the more silent she was thereon. She had expressed curiosity as to whether the child would be brought up a Papist. Still Ruby had gathered that she greatly desired to see him, and this she told Dulcie, adding her belief that Miss Jean would come round in time, and everything yet be pleasant amongst them.

They came in to luncheon with the touch of the fresh spring air on their cheeks; and as they thus, and in the red cloaks, entered the morning-room, Mrs. Chesney exclaimed, "Well, you two are really wonderfully alike! I see it now more than I did last night."

"Which proves," said Dulcie, "that a silk dress was all the difference between us. Uncle Donald, have you been at home all the morning?"

"Yes; but they took the baby away," he added, in an ill-used tone.

"After lunch, Uncle Donald, you must come out and look all round the place. Ruby has seen all things, and was impressed by everything but the stables."

"Oh, yes; the stables are awful," said Maurice. "We intend building some new ones; they are very old, and

at some time or other have been shamefully neglected, so that patching up does not answer now. Besides, they are hideously ugly, and can be seen from the house, so we are going to make great improvements shortly."

"We wanted to have the new stables built before Mrs. Ingram came," added Dulcie; "but somehow we have had so many things to do, and it took such a time to settle about the plans, that here we are, no farther advanced than we were, excepting that we have fixed on the plan. However, we shall ask her opinion on where they are to be built, for they are not to be built again where they now are."

Mr. Ruthven went over them; but with his rustic Highland ideas of stables, they appeared to him to be all that the heart of man or beast could desire. However, he took much interest in the project and plans of the new building, and offered a great deal of advice on the subject, and his only trouble was, that when finished it would be "owre guid for beasts."

To make things pleasant for Ruby, Dulcie gathered her friends about her in the evenings, and to dinners, and there was music and dancing, and the time passed merrily, and Ruby had never before been so gay.

Mr. Ruthven had previously said that he should not stay more than a week at Hunstanleigh; however, it ended in his being three weeks there, and enjoying himself immensely, and being delighted with everything, but the crown of it all was baby. Whether he would have stopped another three weeks it is impossible to say; but Mrs. Ingram, Una, and Alice were all expected within the next three days, and to get comfortably away in time to avoid any risk of meeting this party, was Mr. Ruthven's inmost desire; and to his great thankfulness he managed this to his satisfaction.

Ruby was therefore left behind to stay some time longer with Dulcie. At first, when things had been strange to her, she had looked forward with no little dread to the meeting with the Ingram family; but as she daily became more at home and comfortable at Hunstanleigh, she

began to think that it might not turn out so very terrible after all, as Dulcie laughed her out of this feeling.

But in the inmost recesses of her heart, Dulcie was not without some misgivings about this visit. She had never known Hunstanleigh under Mrs. Ingram's régime, and there must necessarily be many changes and differences, and in all probability these would not meet with approval. However, she made up her mind to do her best to make everything pleasant to them, and then there would surely be little for them to complain of.

They were to arrive by the same afternoon train that Ruby and Mr. Ruthven had come by. They would altogether be a large party, but Dulcie insisted that they must all go to the station to meet them. Accordingly, Maurice went in state in the large carriage, whilst Dulcie drove Ruby in the little pony carriage. Maurice said, to make the procession complete, there should have been a cart containing Ingram, junior, Esquire, trotting along in the rear.

This was the third time that the procession had gone to the station to meet Mrs. Ingram. Twice there had been disappointment, and the arrival had been delayed ; but this time they arrived "and no mistake," as Maurice said ; and Ruby remarked that she had never seen such a bustle and fuss in her life. Servants who were more plague than profit, and who were about as much use in travelling as the man in the moon—luggage to any extent—loose packages and bags, apparently without end,—and lastly Mrs. Ingram, Una, and Alice, in a high state of excitement over all these belongings.

There was great difficulty in getting the loose packages into the carriages. The people seemed to be but of secondary consideration ; and in the efforts to get everybody and everything in somewhere, Ruby was very nearly being packed in the large carriage with Mrs. Ingram and Una ; whereupon she made forcible remonstrance, and fled to the pony carriage, for she would rather have run in the road behind them than have taken that place.

They arrived safely at home, only having had once to

stop, to pick up a package which had fallen over into the road.

Dulcie saw them all comfortably settled in their rooms, and then returned to dress for dinner ; and as she entered her room she said to herself, "Neither of them has inquired after baby—not one of them ;" and then she said, "Nurse, do not bring baby down unless he be sent for ; perhaps they are tired with the journey, and he might worry them."

Ruby came in presently. "Are you there, Dulcie ? I thought perhaps you would be helping them."

"No," said Dulcie ; "they do things differently here to what we do at home ; they have their maid to help them, and if I were to go and offer to do anything for them, they would wonder at me."

Ruby was astonished, but said nothing, and took the baby, and sat down on the hearthrug, and played with him.

Since Mrs. Chesney's departure for her home, and Ruby had had fair opportunity of improving her acquaintance with him, she had become so fond of the baby that she was jealous of any one else who put in any sort of claim to him. Mrs. Ingram and those girls, she supposed, would be thinking that he belonged partly to them ; but surely, she said to herself, she had a greater right to Dulcie's baby than all the rest of them put together.

Ruby and Dulcie, as in old times, descended the stairs to dinner, dressed precisely alike, even to the long, curly brown hair which hung partly down.

Father O'Brian was in the drawing-room, waiting for dinner.

Mrs. Ingram, and the two girls also, had been greatly struck by the resemblance between Ruby and Dulcie ; and now as they watched them move about the drawing-room, dressed exactly alike, they could do nothing but watch them, and wonder how two people could be so much alike.

"I say," said Maurice, presently coming into the room, "isn't Ingram, junior, Esquire, to come down as usual till dinner is ready ? He's putting himself into fits

about it, yelling upstairs. You never saw anything so hideous in your life as he looks."

Dulcie hastened out of the room, walking demurely to the door; but when she had closed it behind her, she took up her dress, flew across the hall, and rushed up the old staircase in the most undignified manner, two steps at a time.

"Ah, the baby!" said Mrs. Ingram. "Dear me, I have been very remiss. I have not inquired for him all this time; but really, what with the luggage and servants, there has been so much to think about. How is he?"

"He is quite well, thank you," answered Ruby, "and such a splendid sturdy fellow! The fact is that we have him down until we go in to dinner, only Dulcie thought perhaps it might tire you after your journey if he came down this evening."

"Oh, pray have him brought down! I am most anxious to see him. Shall I ring the bell?"

"No, I will go and tell Dulcie," said Ruby, hurrying out of the room, only, unlike Dulcie, she did not wait until she reached the door. She ran across the room, hopping between the somewhat crowded furniture.

"Dulcie!" she cried, on entering her room, "Dulcie! Mrs. Ingram wants to see the baby; bring him down, come."

The yelling had ceased with Dulcie's appearance, and he was sitting on her knee with a somewhat forlorn expression, and clutching one of his feet.

"Come away, baby! you shall not be left up here after all," said Ruby, lifting him up. "I will carry him downstairs, and you can take him into the room;" and she danced across the room and along the passages to the stairs, the baby screaming with delight, and showing his toothless gums the while.

"Here, take him," said Ruby, when they had arrived at the drawing-room door. "Wait a moment. There, now you both look all right," and she opened the door whilst Dulcie walked in, feeling strong again under the protection of Ruby and little Maurice; Ruby in the

meantime walking a few yards behind her in deep admiration of the two.

"Is this the baby? dear me!" said Mrs. Ingram, putting on her glasses, and rising to get a good look at her grandson, while he stared at her very indifferently with his great black eyes, and kicked out his feet at her.

Una came forward and looked at him without a word, and Alice standing by remarked that he was a fine child.

Then Maurice took hold of him, and held him high above his head, and Dulcie remonstrated anxiously.

"Dulcie is always afraid that I shall let him fall and break," he said, adding, "Get away, Ruby; you always want him when I have him."

"Give him to me; he is my baby, not yours," said Ruby; and Maurice ran round the room with the baby, followed everywhere by Ruby in vain attempts to catch him.

They were both of them full of nonsense and fun, and laughing heartily; the baby as much as either of them. Mrs. Ingram, Una, and Alice watched them in some amaze; this was a mode of proceeding to which they were not accustomed. What a strange way to behave, in the drawing-room too, whilst they were waiting for dinner!

Father O'Brian, however, had become accustomed to the youth and high spirits of Ruby, Dulcie, and Maurice, and he rather liked the twin sisters, in spite of their heretical religion. Moreover, he was satisfied on the one great point—little Maurice had been baptised into his father's Church. By his influence over Maurice, he had at length gained this point, which had gone sorely against the grain with Dulcie. It would be his business, he said to himself, to see that the child was properly educated in the faith, but in order to do this, he must not throw more difficulties in the path by making an enemy of Dulcie.

By this time he knew well enough that she would never be a convert. Her Scottish bringing up, her Scottish nature, were all too strong in her for this event ever to come to pass; and Father O'Brian was keen enough

to see this, and that his further efforts in that direction would be simply time wasted ; therefore he gave up all hope of this, and only strove to establish himself upon a firm footing of intimate friendliness with her. No trouble was too great for him to take for her ; anything that she expressed a wish for, he never rested until he saw that she had it ; and in twenty ways before the arrival of Mrs. Ingram at Hunstanleigh he had earned himself a claim on her gratitude.

Dulcie felt this, and somehow understood it better than she could have put it into words, and she did not like him the better for it. He tried hard to please her, and she tried hard to like and trust him, but it was impossible, simply impossible. She felt that he was a shadow between her and Maurice, and that he had almost equal influence over him. He knew all the minor details of their domestic life, and, asked or unasked, Dulcie had his opinion thereon, which as often as not transpired through Maurice. She had even begun occasionally to withhold small confidences from Maurice, on things perhaps unimportant, thinking somewhat bitterly, "I do not want Father O'Brian's opinion on that."

If she said anything of this to Maurice, he always answered that he did not tell these things, that Father O'Brian got them out of him, and seemed to know it all, before he said anything ; and this was all the consolation that Dulcie got ; and she registered to herself a vow that, in spite of his baptism, in spite of all the Ingrams, and everybody and everything, her child should not be brought up a Roman Catholic.

"He might marry a Protestant," she said to herself, "and I should not like a priest to come in between him and his wife."

CHAPTER XXXV.

BETTER KNOW THE WORST.

"HAVE you made any acquaintance with the Crawshaws?" inquired Mrs. Ingram, a few days after her arrival.

"Some little acquaintance," said Dulcie; "but they are stiff sort of people, and Maurice does not care much for them. There have been some few calls, and once we dined there, and we invited them to a dinner-party, but they were engaged and did not come."

"It is a pity that you have not seen more of them. They are good people to know; they are very well connected, and have much influence. If you can manage it, dear, I shall be glad if you will invite them to dinner next week. You can say that I have returned from abroad, and shall be glad to see them again. They live at such a distance that one needs invite them."

Thus advised, Dulcie consulted with Maurice and fixed a day, and despatched her note of invitation. The Crawshaws were a rich Catholic family, living on an estate which they had purchased a year or two before, at some ten miles from Hunstanleigh. The family consisted of father and mother, son and daughter. Dulcie and Maurice had seen but very little of them, but the wealth of the Crawshaws was a constant subject of talk about Rolingstoke, and Dulcie had not cared much to increase the intimacy.

This invitation was accepted, and a dinner-party of larger dimensions than usual was got up in their honour, and Dulcie was somewhat anxious about it. It was to be the first dinner-party since Mrs. Ingram's return, and when Dulcie asked her advice in the matter of the dinner, she said, "No, no, my dear, you must arrange it all. I have had so many years of it that it is quite pleasant to give it up, and I shall like to see how you will manage it."

Alice Young and Ruby were good friends. Alice had not yet got over, and perhaps never would quite get

over, Maurice's marriage. She would never be able to forgive Dulcie for marrying him. She could never feel otherwise than jealous of her. She was the only one in the house who took no notice of the baby, or spoke of him to any one else. She saw that Una had been mistaken in her opinion of Maurice, for he was evidently as fond of his wife as he had been a year before. Perhaps he was not quite so assiduous in his attentions, and he did not follow her about "like a shadow," as they had said he did a year before, but that was all. Dulcie's influence was paramount with him, saving and excepting that of Father O'Brian.

"What are you going to wear to-night?" inquired Alice of Ruby, on the morning of the dinner-party.

"Oh, such a pretty dress! Maurice has given it to me. You know that lovely maize-coloured silk of Dulcie's? Well, Maurice wished me to have one exactly like it; he says he likes to puzzle people by our resemblance to one another."

"I wish Maurice would give me a dress," put in Una; "but he never thinks of his sisters now."

"And I have added to the number—six in all, counting the two half-sisters: for you must have been like a sister to him, Alice. He told us, before you came the other day, that he had always felt as if you were one of his sisters."

Una and Alice were silent. Una felt a great desire to let Ruby know how much she was mistaken; however, she was bound by her promise to Alice to keep the secret.

Alice felt that her friendship with Ruby had sustained a shock, and at the same time, that Maurice had dealt her another blow.

As Mrs. Ingram entered the drawing-room that evening, ready dressed for dinner, she looked anxiously across the room at Alice as she stood by the fire, which they had not yet given up, for the spring was late and the weather cold, and the rooms at Hunstanleigh were apt to be chill and cheerless.

She was a tall, stately girl; and as she stood by the

fire, in her long white silk dress with the black velvet bows, she certainly was a fair, pleasant object, and one to which any eye would return again and yet again. She towered above the twins in their pretty maize-coloured dresses; and Mrs. Ingram's eyes rested contentedly on her, for she was certainly looking her best.

Maurice, on the other hand, glanced from Ruby to Dulcie, and noted that *they* were looking their best; and then he looked at Alice as if he defied her or any one else to match them.

The bodies of Una's dresses were all made after one fashion, and it was that which most effectually hid the curved spine. They had studied this so long and attentively that really the deformity was but little noticeable. She was like Maurice, and like her mother; and she would have been handsome but for the peevish, restless look in her face. She looked at the group about the fire-place, at the girls with their pretty rounded figures—"Ah! I cannot look like that," was the thought which crossed her, as it ceaselessly did, and her face clouded yet more.

The guests began to arrive, and amongst them the Crawshaws; the father, short, stout, and with a very large nose and a little white fringe round his shining crown; the mother particularly tall and particularly thin, with pointed nose and chin; she had very small black eyes, with which she looked down at some distance upon her little fat husband. There was Miss Camilla Crawshaw, with flaxen hair and green beetles and pink roses on it, and eyelashes which were dark, and apt to look peculiar and unnatural when you got the light on the other side of her; it was said that her eyelashes had grown dark lately, and it was kind of them to do so. Lastly, there was the only son, Merton Crawshaw, with his hair, which was as flaxen as his sister's, parted down the middle, with a most satisfactory moustache and flaxen eyelashes. They were all dressed within an inch of their lives.

Ruby had begun the evening by thinking her maize-coloured silk excessively grand; but after this arrival she

was forced to confess that it was nothing very wonderful after all.

Mr. Merton Crawshaw had been for some time begging his sister and mother to come and call at Hurstanleigh. It was the fashion in Rolingstoke to admire young Mrs. Ingram; and, lately, Mr. Merton Crawshaw had heard, wherever he visited, of the advent of young Mrs. Ingram's sister, Miss Duncan, who was by all accounts remarkably pretty, and strangely like the pretty Mrs. Ingram. New faces and strangers were rare in Rolingstoke, and Mr. Merton Crawshaw was immensely curious and anxious to see her; his sister and mother always had some business of their own to attend to, and usually put off his proposed visit with "We will see if we can manage it to-morrow."

Twice he had been within an ace of meeting Miss Duncan; once he had seen the backs of two ladies getting into a carriage and driving away from a door just as he drove his own horses up to it, and when he got inside the house he heard that young Mrs. Ingram and Miss Duncan had just left it.

Another time he heard that Mr. and Mrs. Ingram and Miss Duncan were to be at a small dance, to which he also was invited. The time and pains he spent at his toilet none can tell; and finally that his entrance should cause still greater sensation, he timed himself so as to arrive at the house exactly at five minutes past one. As soon as he arrived, he heard that the Ingrams and Miss Duncan had left the house just five minutes ago. This was trying, and he began to think of his eight miles' drive, back to Gondeshill.

This invitation, therefore, had been exactly what he wished for; and surely, unless the evil fates were concerned in the matter, he would this night behold the wonderful Miss Duncan.

Mrs. Ingram the elder was sitting close to him; and she began,—“I suppose you know every one here? That young lady is Miss Duncan, sister of my daughter-in-law; and that is my youngest daughter, Una. You have met her several times I know; but Alice Young, my

adopted daughter, I think you have never been introduced to : she was always away from home when you were here was she not ? I must introduce you." And she beckoned to Alice ; and whilst she was crossing the room she continued, "She was a ward of ours ; and it seems so strange that you should not know her. Miss Alice Young Mr. Merton Crawshaw."

They were both young, good-looking, and rich, and were both Catholics ; and Mrs. Ingram walked away where Father O'Brian stood, satisfied that she had done her duty.

Alice Young was fair ; but there happened to be good many fair girls about Rolingstoke and Gondeshi ; his sister was fair ; he was fair himself ; and Merton Crawshaw was tired of himself and of fair people in general, and his eye travelled across the room where the twins stood together. They were as alike as was possible to be, even to their pretty dark-brown hair and the maize-coloured dresses ; and Merton Crawshaw decided that the coming of Miss Duncan was a real advantage to the neighbourhood.

It was his fate to take Alice in to dinner. Mrs. Ingram had given Dulcie a hint that this would be a good arrangement ; and Dulcie was ready to agree to anything that she wished.

Ruby sat at table opposite to Merton Crawshaw ; and that gentleman spent a good deal of his time in staring at her, fondly imagining that he managed this so clever that neither she nor anybody else observed it ; but whenever did not notice it, Alice and Ruby both did.

"I wish that she would laugh," he said to himself "I should like to see whether she has the pretty teeth and the dimples that young Mrs. Ingram has."

But Ruby thought that this ceremonious dinner-party was not a thing to be trifled with, and such a thing : laughter decidedly out of place. The curate had taken her in to dinner ; and he was so occupied in watching Father O'Brian, that he neglected to amuse his neighbours.

By-and-by, Dulcie said, "Ruby, do you remember

Auntie Bell sitting on the cat?"—and a moment later, Alice heard Merton Crawshaw say, "By Jove she has!" and he added to himself, "she's awfully pretty!" and at the same moment he let his eye-glass fall from his eye to the edge of his plate with a clatter. It was a mercy for him that it was not broken, or he might have looked across the table in vain afterwards, indeed he might later on have searched all over the drawing-room before he would be able to find Miss Duncan.

In the drawing-room the ladies chiefly gathered about the fire; and Mrs. Ingram volunteered to take Mrs. Crawshaw up-stairs to show her the little grandson asleep in his nursery. And Mrs. Crawshaw agreed to be taken, not because she cared particularly for this or any other baby, but because it was as well to be polite, and it also helped to pass away the time till the gentlemen rejoined them and it was time to set out again on the ten miles' drive to Gondeshill.

The baby lay asleep in his bassinette, looking particularly like any other plump, healthy baby; and then Mrs. Ingram had a long chat with Mrs. Crawshaw, and managed to bring the conversation round to Alice; that she had been a ward of her husband's, of her difficulties respecting the child's religion, of Alice's recent reception into the Catholic Church, and lastly of her large fortune. Mrs. Crawshaw, instead of being sleepy, became interested, then sociable, and then she spoke of her son; and before they descended again to the drawing-room, these two ladies thoroughly understood one another as plainly as if they had spoken the words.

"She will do for Merton," said Mrs. Crawshaw to herself, as she descended the broad old staircase, her richly trimmed skirts following her meagre, shapeless figure down the steps.

"That young Crawshaw must be fabulously rich. I do not see any reason why Alice should not have him," said Mrs. Ingram to herself, as at the same time her stately figure followed Mrs. Crawshaw down-stairs.

A rage to see the baby had spread, and Ruby and Dulcie had taken all the ladies up in turn, that they

might enjoy the spectacle ; but Mrs. Ingram and Mrs. Crawshaw had lingered so long, that when they entered they found the gentlemen had returned to the drawing-room, tea and coffee were being handed about, and the piano was open and music going on.

Ruby and Dulcie were singing one of their favourite old Scotch duets, whilst Maurice played the accompaniment.

The two ladies who entered looked round the room. Alice Young was talking very animatedly to the wrong gentleman entirely, and Merton Crawshaw, with his flaxen head almost buried amongst the curtains, was leaning against the wall close by the piano. A blaze shot out at them from one of his eyes ; but it was only a reflected light in the eye-glass, his eyes were fixed on the singers.

"It's a rum thing," he said to himself, "but I had a fixed notion that Scotch girls had freckles, enormous mouths, red hair, green eyes, squint, and all that sort of thing. I can't say how I came by the fixed notion, but I certainly had it ; by Jove, it's a rum thing !"

Before the Crawshaw carriage was announced, Merton Crawshaw had decided that Miss Duncan was not only an advantage to Rolingstoke, but also to Gondeshill. She was perhaps a little sharp and quick, always ready with her replies, which made him feel that he must try and keep very wide awake and his wits alive, and hold his eye-glass very securely under his eyebrow, so as to be able to catch any second meaning that her words might have, and to assist him, if possible, to a repartee.

It was perhaps a little strain on his nerves to hold a conversation with so ready-witted a young lady ; but then she was awfully pretty, and if he did succeed with a repartee, why he felt that he had achieved something worth achieving. A thought however suddenly crossed him, that made him shudder with horror, and paralysed his tongue and thoughts for some little time afterwards. It was an awful suggestion ; so awful, that he felt that his peace of mind demanded satisfaction on the spot, and he settled in his own mind that before he left the house that

night he would find out about it, even if it were to know the worst.

In the meantime Mrs. Crawshaw took an opportunity of telling her husband that she thought it might be as well to fix an evening for the Ingrams to come and dine with them at Gondeshill before they left that night.

"There is no hurry about it," he answered. "It will do just as well to send them a note in a day or two."

This reply was of course excusable she settled in her own mind, for he was not yet let into the secret, but she would take an opportunity, a very early opportunity, of informing him of her designs. His opinion on the matter she would not ask; she never had asked, and never intended to ask, his opinion on any subject. She would honour him by letting him know the plans she and Mrs. Ingram were laying, and it would be his duty to follow her bidding and do his best to ensure their being carried out. Long years had brought this state of things into being. How could it be otherwise? What chance had a little stout, round, good-natured man with a shiny head, against a tall, thin, determined woman with a pointed nose and a large cap composed of real lace?

Mrs. Crawshaw had mentioned her intentions about the dinner to her husband; what more could she do? The best thing was to settle with the two Mrs. Ingrams an early day that would be convenient for their whole party to come over and dine in a friendly manner at Gondeshill.

Dulcie could not quite picture to herself a friendly dinner at Gondeshill—a friendly dinner in her acceptance of the term. However, the thing was inevitable. She consulted with Maurice, and a day, five days later, was fixed on, and then the Crawshaw family collected, to start on their long drive home.

They were standing in a group, Ruby amongst them, and as Merton Crawshaw advanced to say good night it occurred to him that this was a nuisance. Here was the last moment, and he had not yet satisfied himself on the one important point which troubled him. He would not be beaten, however, of that he assured himself, and he

raked his brain from one empty corner to the other whilst his family were waiting for him; then he rolled his eyes round the room, and suddenly fixed his eye-glass firmly in his eye, and finally said—

"Oh, Miss Duncan, please will you lend me that Scotch song you sang, 'Wha's at the window?' I will not keep it long."

"Certainly," said Ruby, crossing the room to the piano, whereon lay the music-books. Merton Crawshaw, with determination of purpose beaming through the eye-glass, which was fixed on her, dodged amongst the collection of little sofas, chairs, and tables after her, walking deliberately over the trains of every dress that came in the way, till they arrived at the grand piano.

It was not until Ruby had picked out the song in question and handed it to him, that he mustered courage to say his say—

"Miss Duncan, I forgot to ask you if—if you—hem!"

"I beg your pardon," said Ruby, turning to him. "I did not hear what you said."

"Oh, nothing particular," he said, turning very red. "I merely wanted to ask you—I am sure I don't know why I did, but I wanted to ask you—you know there is such a deal of it about the neighbourhood, that you will excuse my asking the question—but eh—do you go in for the rights of women?"

Ruby looked half puzzled for one moment, then said, "Oh, dear no!" and as she shook hands with him she laughed a merry laugh.

Young Merton Crawshaw gave one more look at her dimples, and went on his way rejoicing.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A DINNER AT GONDESHILL.

DULCIE's dinner-party had been a great success. Even Maurice and Mrs. Ingram had praised her heartily for the way in which it had gone off, and no successful Minister of State could have been more proud and elated than was Dulcie.

But Dulcie well knew in the recesses of her heart that her success, brilliant as it had been, was primarily owing to the deft, skilful fingers of the Scotch cook—a creature with a kind, warm heart, an unreasonable and violent temper; but, like most of her countrywomen, with an inborn genius for cooking; and Dulcie knew how to give thanks where thanks were due. On the following morning she had an interview with this lady, and simply told her that her dinner had been perfection—that it would have been impossible to find a fault with anything—that one or two of her dishes had been greatly praised, “and I must thank you very much for this,” she added, “because now I shall never be anxious in giving a large dinner-party, since I know that the cook can make it such a success.”

Mrs. Cook took herself off to the regions which she ruled over with such a rod of iron, swelling with importance and delight; the young mistress's kind words were worth every bit as much, she thought, as the master's present of a sovereign, and she registered a vow that her next dinner should by some manner of means surpass even the one of last night.

During this interview Ruby had gone out with the nurse and baby on their morning walk, Maurice was seeing people on business in his study, and Mrs. Ingram sitting in her favourite old room, which had always been “her room.” Alice was with her, Una being out driving.

Their conversation was naturally of the previous evening's party. They had praised the dinner and Dulcie's management, which was so good that they had one and all been taken by surprise, and wondered where

she could have learnt it. Their present conversation was of the guests, and Mrs. Ingram was dwelling on an account of the goodness and riches of the Crawshaw family. She had at some time or other heard an anecdote about young Merton Crawshaw which told more to his credit than against him, but that was all that could be said. Mrs. Ingram was relating this little adventure, and it is astonishing what importance can be squeezed into small matters by skilful tongues. Not that Mrs. Ingram romanced particularly on the subject either, she merely related it under the influence of being very kindly disposed towards the young gentleman in question.

Alice was much interested, and inclined to appreciate the part he had played in the story. She told Mrs. Ingram that really it would have been impossible to imagine that so much right feeling and delicacy was hidden behind that odd sort of manner of his.

"I believe, too, that Camilla, the daughter, is a particularly pleasant girl. I hear through Father O'Brian that she spends a great deal of her money on the poor; but then, you see, when people are rich as the Crawshaws are, what would be a great deal to moderately rich people is a mere nothing to them. I hope that during our stay at Hunstanleigh we shall become very much more intimate with the family."

They were a large party—a disgracefully large party, Una said—when assembled ready to start for Gondes-hill; but Mrs. Crawshaw had so firmly insisted that they must *all* come, that there was no getting out of it. They filled two carriages; Mrs. Ingram, Dulcie, and Maurice being in one carriage, Alice, Ruby, and Una in the other; and they had the least pleasant drive of the two, for in spite of Ruby's happy, friendship-making nature, she travelled no further along the road to intimacy with Alice and Una. There was an indescribable something ever between them, like a shadow, and Ruby had come to believe that this must be the difference in religion, and that the shadows were the priests, holding them apart with ghostly hands.

Ruby stood greatly in awe of the priests. She had

experienced the same sensation that Dulcie had felt before her, that priests were not like the rest of the world, and there was one in particular, a certain Father Lance, who sometimes came to Hunstanleigh, to whom she had the greatest aversion, and many a time she would tell Dulcie in confidence that at all events "thou one" was not canny. "I will tell you the impression he always gives me," she had said. "I always fancy that he must have been buried, and in the meantime got to know everything, and was dug up again. I feel as if he were what we call in Arran a 'bawkan.' I say, Dulcie, do you not think the priests are different to other folks? Is it just their way to pretend that they know so much better than anybody else?"

Dulcie assured her of her belief that a priest was really just like any other body, the rest was only a manner which they put on.

Gondeshill and its possessors were in a magnificent state of preparation for the expected guests. Merton Crawshaw had had his flaxen locks washed in champagne and curled by his valet, his tie was a marvel, his boots a wonder, and his eye-glass polished and ready for immediate use. His mother had had some little conversation with him on the subject of Miss Young, that she was a particularly nice girl, which meant that she had a good fortune, and was a Catholic. Now, although Merton Crawshaw's brain was slow in some things, there were nevertheless others which he was quick enough at reading, and he laid a plan yet deeper than that of his maternal parent. "If that's their little game," he said to himself, "all right. I then consider Miss Young a fine institution. She is tall enough to hide on the other side of her the little Scotch girl with the dimples. Couldn't have been anything better!" He was therefore prepared to receive Miss Young in all graciousness, and with every mark of friendship.

As Dulcie had told Ruby it would be, there were nearly twenty people present at the friendly dinner, and in no one thing did it differ from a regular dinner-party.

Conversation at a dinner-party is seldom cheerful or enlivening, and Merton Crawshaw was not ill-pleased that this should be the part of the evening he was to devote to Miss Young. By-and-by, when they should all be again assembled in the great drawing-rooms, which seemed all purple and gold and mirrors, there would be opportunities for another sprightly conversation with the little Scotch girl, who was such fun.

Alice Young was a pleasant, talkative girl, brought up to dinner-parties and small talk, and who knew well enough how to make the time pass pleasantly to any one for whom she chose to exert herself. And she had been greatly interested in all that she had heard of the family they were now visiting, and the son in particular. Sitting at table beside the heir to all the purple, gold, and mirrors in the other room, she looked once or twice at his profile of hooked nose and retreating chin, of which she had a good view, and then at the flaxen locks ; and she thought how impossible, after all, it was to judge of character by personal appearance.

When there happens to be a plan at dinner-parties, that such and such people imperatively must go in to dinner together, the guests of minor importance oftentimes get strangely sorted, and Ruby was portioned off to a learned and scientific gentleman, who was the much-enduring father of fifteen children. His hair was gone from the top of his head, but round the crown grew a brown fringe, which hung in flaky locks to his shoulders. All interest in those things immediately about him had long ago forsaken him, and Ruby at length was quite glad when he quietly pursued his business of eating without addressing unexpected remarks to her, or making sudden starts when he was recalled to what was going on around him.

Long before the dinner was over, Ruby had enough to do in strangling yawns, which would follow one another ; and she trusted that the dinner would come to an end before she had dislocated her jaw.

In the purple and gold drawing-rooms, Camilla Craw-

shaw did her best to be polite and friendly to the guests from Hunstanleigh. It is more than probable that her mother had had some conversation with her relative to Alice Young, for her advances were almost more than friendly. She spoke so much of future meetings, and of Hunstanleigh, that Mrs. Ingram took an opportunity of saying to Dulcie, "Can't you ask the two young people over for the day, to come to lunch?"

Dulcie did not particularly desire this. However, she did not hesitate for one moment. She gave her invitation in as friendly a manner as she could, and it was eagerly accepted.

When Merton Crawshaw arrived in the drawing-room, Alice Young was asked to play. Now the sound of the piano is always the signal for conversation in a well-conducted drawing-room, and he thought that now was the time for the conversation with Miss Duncan to which he had so looked forward; but, to his disgust, Ruby took upon herself the duty of turning over Alice's pages for her. Then Ruby herself had to sing; and when they left the piano, and made room for the performances of the other young ladies, as he had just taken his seat by Ruby, Mrs. Crawshaw advanced, saying, "Merton, I want you to show Miss Young your sketches of Switzerland."

"Really," said he, "I assure you they are not worth looking at."

"Oh, please let me see them," said Alice, "I know Switzerland so well, and shall enjoy seeing them of all things."

He rose with an ill-grace, and, Alice following him, he led the way to an inner drawing-room, saying to himself things which were not pretty as he went. There, in a gorgeous portfolio on a gorgeous stand, were the gorgeously mounted drawings of Merton Crawshaw. He knew well enough what a number of them there were, and what a long time it would take to look through them, and he devoutly wished the gorgeous affair at the bottom of the sea.

"Dulcie," said Ruby, presently, "do go home; it

must be time. All I can say is, if we stop here much longer I shall disgrace the whole family by falling asleep."

"I will see what Mrs. Ingram says," was the answer.

But when Dulcie inquired of her whether she thought it time for them to be going, particularly as they had so long a drive, Mrs. Ingram found there was no other way out of it than by letting Dulcie into her plans.

"There is no hurry, dear," she said. "Alice and young Crawshaw seem to be very merry and sociable in the inner room there; it is a pity to disturb them just yet."

A light broke over Dulcie, and she smiled an answering smile to Mrs. Ingram, and would have turned away to wait as long as Alice pleased to keep her, when Ruby came up to her, saying—

"Oh, are you not ready to go, Mrs. Ingram?—are you not dreadfully tired?"

"I am rather tired; but we have just agreed that it is a little early to hurry away."

"Oh, Dulcie, cannot some of us go home first? You see we came in two carriages," said Ruby.

"I think you could go," said Mrs. Ingram to Dulcie, "for you could easily make some excuse about the baby to Mrs. Crawshaw, and we could stay a little longer."

Ruby urged her to do this; and Dulcie, nothing loth, managed her excuses with her hostess very well, on the ground of that old institution, "baby;" and she and Ruby and Maurice, leaving the rest to follow when they chose, took their departure, only too well pleased to exchange the purple and gold and glitter for the dark comfort of the easy carriage, wherein they could rest and yawn to their hearts' content.

"Oh, Dulcie; please don't take me to any more dinners, whether friendly or otherwise," said Ruby, taking off her gloves, and curling her fingers about. "There used to be some sense in friendly dinners at home, when Mr. Pierrepont and Norman and Uncle Donald were there, and Auntie Bell and Auntie Jean were full of fun; but really this kind of thing—well, it's

just terrible. No wonder that Merton Crawshaw is such a daft kind of boy."

(The sensations of the gentleman who had had his flaxen locks washed in champagne would not have been pleasant could he have overheard these sentences spoken, very decidedly, in Ruby's Scotch intonation.)

"He is just nothing better," said Dulcie. "He has a way, too, of constantly letting his eye-glass fall, and every time regularly I think that it is his eye. I wonder what our Auntie Jean would say to it? I can just fancy the way she would look at him, and say, 'Man, what are ye at wi' thae fooleries?'"

Ruby and Maurice laughed heartily, for Dulcie could imitate Auntie Jean perfectly.

"Oh, Ruby," she suddenly added, "I do weary to see her! I do not suppose she would come to see me, but couldn't I go to see her? What would she say? Tell me about Norman and Mr. Pierrepoint."

"There is so little to tell about them," was the answer. "Norman is working away in Glasgow. I suppose it takes a long while for men to get on in business; but they all say that he is so lucky in getting on, and he is so clever, and seems to understand the business so well, that the firm trust a great deal in his hands. He says that the Scotch generally are not a speculative, enterprising people; and he has been continually advising the firm to enter into a connexion with an American house, and at last they have ventured it. But they are still anxious about it, and they have entrusted the chief part of this business to Norman, and it is more likely than not that he will have to go over to the United States, and at a moment's notice too. Uncle Donald and Auntie Jean always say that if this negotiation is a success, they will be sure to make Norman a junior partner; and of course Uncle Donald and Auntie Jean fully believe that Norman must succeed in whatever he puts his hand to."

"Dear old Norman! of course he will," said Dulcie. "And what of Mr. Pierrepoint?"

"Oh, Mr. Pierrepoint has taken some rooms in

Brodick, and paints there, but he is constantly away from home. He goes to London and different places about his pictures and business connected with them. He is getting on too, capitally; we often see notices in the papers about his pictures."

"Does Auntie Bell wear a blue bonnet still when he is at home?" inquired Dulcie, slyly.

"I do not know," said Ruby rather shortly; "of course she and all of us are pleased that his pictures are getting so popular now."

"Does he ever ask after me?" added Dulcie.

"I should think he did. I always tell him all the news I can of you; and he is so interested in whatever we can tell him."

"How I should like to see them again!" said Dulcie. "I think I might ask Mr. Pierrepont and Norman to Hunstanleigh; don't you think so, Maurice?"

"Yes; why not?"

And so they talked of old times and friends, until they arrived at Hunstanleigh.

And Ruby thought of nothing else than of getting to sleep; and Dulcie took up the baby, longing more than she could tell to carry him off to the Highlands. She would have given worlds to have been able to teach his feet to walk on the sandy roads amongst the fir trees, and that his bonnie black eyes should have become first acquainted with heather and blue-bells, instead of the sombre trees and the flat country about Hunstanleigh. However, it was not to be; and at all events she had him and his father, although Auntie Jean and the purple moors were not to be had.

The next morning at breakfast-time, Mrs. Ingram astonished Dulcie not a little by informing her that the Gondeshill party were all coming over that day to luncheon. The day that Dulcie had fixed did not suit, for it seemed that Merton Crawshaw had an engagement for that day; accordingly the following day had been fixed.

The weather was much more genial than it had been; and Hunstanleigh was much improved in appearance

since Ruby's first arrival. The trees were freshly green, for it was the early part of May now, and spring flowers were gay, like the fruit trees.

Camilla Crawshaw appeared with her brother, gay as any spring flower; and, after luncheon, the whole party wandered about the gardens and woods, looking at and admiring everything.

Ruby was at her very brightest and best. She took compassion on the poor daft body, and thought it her duty to do her best to amuse him. She told him how she and Dulcie used to climb about the burns in Arran, and various anecdotes connected with their expeditions; and Merton Crawshaw, who liked to be amused, said to himself that he was having a jolly time. She told him of their meeting Harold Pierrepont on the burnside, when she and Dulcie had had both arms full of ferns, and how they had fallen into the water; and the thin young man laughed loudly, with a hoarse crackling laugh, that made Ruby look up at him in astonishment, with her mouth slightly open. It made Alice Young and Camilla Crawshaw look round and ask them what they were laughing at.

Such amusing young ladies were not common in the neighbourhood. Moreover, she was particularly pretty; and, above all, she desired no more rights for her sex than those which they now enjoyed; and Merton Crawshaw never left her side that afternoon. Again in the evening he followed her, begging for one of her Scotch songs; and after this he produced some music, and volunteered, without the slightest provocation, to sing, if Miss Duncan would play the accompaniment.

Ruby could not play at sight, and Mrs. Ingram desired Alice to play it; indeed, Mrs. Ingram was not altogether contented at the success of the afternoon. It was plainly apparent to any looker-on that the heir of Gondeshill, with its purple, gold, and mirrors, had not a word or look of interest for any one there but Ruby Duncan.

And Mrs. Ingram was very angry. What right had she to interfere with her plans, a presuming, affected girl? She had never liked her; she had been made too

much of in the house because she was Dulcie's sister. She had been allowed to do and say what she pleased, and even Maurice had made an absurd fuss with her. Alice and Una were nothing in the house, in comparison with this raw Scotch girl, who was flirting and doing mischief, when her own sense should have told her better.

She must give Dulcie a hint ; such things were not to be submitted to.

Dulcie, however, would need no hint, for she saw plainly enough what was going on. She knew that Mrs. Ingram was very angry, and then she looked at Ruby and the thin young man that she called the "daft body." At any rate, Mrs. Ingram need fear nothing on Ruby's side, she knew well enough, for she was only amusing him and herself too, as she thought, in the most innocent way. She knew well enough that Mrs. Ingram would call it flirting, but she equally well knew that it was nothing of the kind.

Shortly before the Crawshaws left that evening Mrs. Ingram heard voices in the conservatory which led from one of the drawing-room windows, and she distinctly heard Merton Crawshaw say, "How much longer will you be here?"

"I cannot say exactly," answered Ruby's voice, "perhaps a week or two."

"Oh, that's fine !" was the answer. "They have been asking me to come over again, and now that I find that you are going to be here I shall come."

Mrs. Ingram entered the conservatory, saying, "Mr. Crawshaw, your sister is looking everywhere for you ;" and she waited until they came out.

That night, in Ruby's room, Dulcie unfolded to her the plan that Mrs. Ingram had laid for Alice and Merton Crawshaw, and that, owing to her, the scheme for the day had been a failure. And Ruby was filled with wonder, and inclined to be somewhat offended at Mrs. Ingram's supposing for one moment that she had wished to come in between them. "Why, I thought I was just taking some trouble off their hands by trying to amuse him—

such a daft-like creature, too!" Dulcie did not leave her until she had quite got over her slight attack of anger, and the two had had a good laugh over the affair.

But this was not to be the end of it. Merton Crawshaw, good as his word, rode his horse over very frequently to the hospitable shades of Hunstanleigh, and day after day sought the company of the bright, pretty Scotch girl.

Mrs. Ingram lost all patience, and plainly showed Ruby, without saying it in so many words, that it was now high time that she travelled back to her native Highlands; and Ruby needed not a second hint, she became impatient to be off, chafing at any necessary delay.

"I will come again, Dulcie," she said, "as soon as they are gone and you are alone again; only I cannot stay here with them any longer."

And so, without even one farewell word, or sign or warning to Merton Crawshaw, Ruby returned post haste to Scotland, accompanied as far on her way as Edinburgh by Maurice; he then saw her into the Glasgow train. At Glasgow Uncle Donald was to meet her. Having accomplished this, Maurice returned to his family at Hunstanleigh.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CHANCE AND CHANGE.

SPRING days, and particularly days in May, are apt to be changeable; one day is hot and summer-like, and the next there is a biting cold wind, which seems to search round you for an unprotected place where it may attack you.

Maurice, as he took his seat in the train at Edinburgh, shivered and tucked his railway wrapper closely round his legs. He took off his stiff hat and settled a sealskin cap on his head; then he shivered again and wished it

were not such a distance to York. He was the only occupant of his carriage, and to console himself he lighted a cigar.

By-and-by he fell asleep, and slept whilst they passed through several stations. He was some long way on his journey, when the door of the carriage was opened somewhat briskly and a traveller hastily entered. He was a tall, largely-made man, with a rough Inverness wrapper; and Maurice, suddenly awakened from his comforting sleep, felt decidedly hostile towards the invader of his peace. He lay lazily watching his movements as he packed his property about him, and thought what a great huge fellow he was.

Then the stranger turned round and threw himself back into a seat, and for the first time, as the train began to move out of the station, showed his face.

With one more look at him, Maurice started to his feet, kicking away his rug, and stretched out a friendly hand. "Pierrepoint!" he said, "how do you do? Right glad to see you! This is an unexpected meeting."

"Maurice Ingram!" said Harold Pierrepoint, alike rising to his feet, and warmly shaking the hand that was held out to him, "is it you?"

Explanations followed. Harold Pierrepoint had been north on business, was now on his way to London. Maurice told him that he had just escorted Ruby as far as Edinburgh on her road home; that she had been staying with his wife and him.

"I shall have to change in a little while," said Maurice then. "I have to get on to another line for Rolingstoke; indeed, there will be a second small change. We are rather out of the way. I say," he added, "can't you come too? I mean, on to my house; my wife would be delighted to see you."

"Couldn't possibly, thanks," was the answer.

"Pooh, nonsense; come just for a day and night; you surely can spare us that time. Dulcie was only speaking of you a little while ago, and saying that she should like to ask you to Hunstanleigh."

"Did she?" said Harold Pierrepoint.

"Yes; I know she would like to see you. Say you will come."

"But I've got my ticket for London."

"Well, get another for Rolingstoke."

"All right; I will."

This matter being settled, they talked on one subject and another until it was time to change.

As they began to approach Rolingstoke, Harold Pierrepont looked curiously about him, saying that he did not know that part of the country at all. The last change was at a small station within sight of Gondeshill, and Maurice looked smilingly at the great house in the distance, and wondered whether Dulcie would have anything funny to tell him about the thin flaxen-haired young man when he got back.

All this while Harold Pierrepont was trying to realise that this man who had insisted on carrying him off was Dulcie's husband, and it was to her new home he was now hurrying, and that in so very short a time he should see her again.

Then his memory travelled back to when he had last seen her, on New Year's night, now well nigh a year and a half ago; how she had begged a favour of him, and how he had refused to grant it; but the girl, wilful and strong in her love, had in spite of this dared all things for the sake of the man sitting now opposite to him. And his eyes travelled across to him, and rested thoughtfully on his face. Was he worthy of this and of her? Maurice Ingram was undoubtedly a very handsome man, and tall and well made; the weakest part of his face, his small undecided mouth, being hidden by his black moustache.

"No wonder the girl loved him," thought Harold Pierrepont. "Any woman would love him. How could I wonder at it? Ah, well, if only she may be happy!"

"There she is!" cried Maurice, as the train rushed into Rolingstoke station.

Harold Pierrepont saw several people standing on the platform. There was one elegant-looking lady, in a violet silk dress. That couldn't possibly be Dulcie.

As the carriage door opened, Harold Pierrepont turned himself about and busied himself with the rugs and bags, whilst he heard sounds of greeting and glad voices. Then Maurice said, "Dulcie, I have brought you a visitor—collected him on the way." And Harold Pierrepont, wrapped in the great Inverness wrapper, bundled out of the door, and came face to face with Dulcie, who wore the violet silk dress, on which he had looked from the window.

A bright colour rushed all over her face, and she held out both her hands. "Oh, Mr. Pierrepont," she said; "is it really you? I am so very, very glad to see you—welcome a hundred times!"

It was all as a dream to Harold Pierrepont. Mrs. Ingram and the rest he seemed to perceive as though through the wrong end of a telescope, moving about, and saying meaningless things; but the one figure that he could see plainly and follow ceaselessly with his eyes, was Dulcie—only Dulcie, as he thought, yet more perfect and more beautiful than she had ever stood in his imagination.

To her, he was just a whiff of home, of the heather and Auntie Jean and dear old days, and she hovered about him, talked to him, sang to him, and ministered to his comfort all the evening; and he went to his bed fairly dazed and wondering.

At breakfast-time the next morning, the talk was of the new stables—the project which was just then fully occupying the household. When the meal was finished, they showed Harold Pierrepont the plans for the new building, explaining all that was to be explained; and then it was proposed that he should come into the grounds, and see the dilapidated old stables, also the proposed site for the new buildings.

Now there was considerable dissension amongst them as to this site. Mrs. Ingram, Una, and Alice all had fixed on one place, and Maurice fixed on quite another. Dulcie said she did not particularly care where they were, provided that they were well out of sight of the house, but she should not have chosen either of the spots that they had fixed on.

Now this was puzzling and tiresome, and delay was caused by their being totally unable to agree. They had asked advice of all their friends, and they each succeeded in getting an equal number to vote on their side, and the new stables at Hunstanleigh were quite a matter for conversation in the neighbourhood.

They took Harold Pierrepont into the grounds after showing him the old stables. They all went together, anxious to see that nothing unfair was done on either side, and desired him to give his opinion as to the spot he should select as a favourable site.

He was not a little puzzled. He said to himself that there were fifty spots alike suitable for the purpose, and he ended by pointing out a part of the grounds which no one else had yet thought of. "There," he said; "I should say that would be as good a place as any to build your stables. It is a convenient distance from the house, there is a spring of water here, a pond close by; there would be plenty of light and air on one side, and shade on the other."

"Well, at any rate, it is quite a new suggestion," said Dulcie. "No one else has pitched on this place; and I am not sure that it is not the best idea yet."

But the other two sides became hot and excited, and they carried him off to point out the spots that they had chosen, and to argue out their respective merits.

And Harold Pierrepont agreed with them both. He said they were both far better than the site of the present stables. Still, he said, he should prefer the spot he had fixed on; and Dulcie, who until now had been uncertain where she should like the new building, fixed upon Harold Pierrepont's choice at once.

Hunstanleigh was now at its best, and Dulcie was glad that Harold Pierrepont should so see it. They took him all over the grounds, all through the large old house, and finally showed him the baby. And, strange to say, Harold Pierrepont was disappointed in him. He would have admired him more if he had had Dulcie's velvety-brown eyes and dimples; but his eyes were so intensely black, and, as he said, his artist's eye travelling over the tiny

features, "Every line of his face will be an exact counterpart of his father's." And somehow Harold Pierrepont never had lost, and never would entirely get over, that first instinctive dislike of Maurice Ingram.

"What do you think of him?" said Dulcie.

"He is a splendid child, and wonderfully, strangely like his father."

"Do you hear that, baby?" cried Dulcie, well pleased. "You could not possibly have had a greater compliment."

"How odd it is, Mr. Pierrepont," she said again, "we are always meeting you by chance. We first met you by chance in the burn—do you remember it?—and now I daresay we should not have seen you for ages if Maurice had not come upon you in the train."

"It does seem odd; but nothing half so odd as the chance which led you to find your husband."

"My husband!"

"Yes; you surely have not forgotten how you wandered out of the path in the Fairies' Glen, and came across a man sleeping in the ferns?"

"I should think I have not," said Dulcie, laughing. "Whatever else I forget, I am not likely to forget that. But, Mr. Pierrepont, now that you are here, do stay a short time; do not run away again directly we have found you. It is such a pleasure to me to have you here: you are the only bit of home that I have. Do stay a little while."

It would have been difficult for him to tear himself away anyhow; but after these words of hers, so evidently spoken in all sincerity, he certainly would stay a few days longer, at any rate.

He and Maurice went out together in the afternoon, and Dulcie was left to the companionship of Una and Alice. Now Dulcie had seen Alice being so pleasant and agreeable to others, that she often found herself wondering why it was that she and Alice were not greater friends; but she already knew that this would probably never be. She almost felt that there was some unseen and invisible barrier which kept them apart; and she was really sorry for it, for she sorely missed the com-

panionship of Ruby, and much needed the daily friendship of a girl of her own age. From Una she did not expect it, for she plainly saw that Una greatly disliked her, she was for ever assailing her with bitter and sarcastic remarks, and indeed trying in every way to make her life at Hunstanleigh anything but agreeable. And Dulcie set this down partly to peevishness connected with her infirmities, and partly to dislike that Maurice should have married a heretic. But then Dulcie saw that Alice was no favourite of Una's either. So her dislike of herself did not worry her so much as it would otherwise have done. If only Alice would like her it would be so nice, she thought, for she admired Alice exceedingly, and did not hide her admiration from her.

And Alice saw that Dulcie was doing her best to please her, and she asked herself why she should resist so much sweetness and prettiness, and receive kindnesses and thoughtfulness in such an ungracious way? And she was obliged to own that it was this very prettiness and sweetness which made her resist her, for she well knew that all this was also employed for Maurice's benefit, and that she had thereby kept even his weak unstable nature true to her, as she, Alice, had been unable to do; and yet had she not done more for him than this girl who was his wife? Dulcie's wooing and her married life had run smoothly and in pleasant places. She had merely taken the love he offered to her and given hers in return; whilst Alice had fought and battled with his father for him, and kept true and staunch when all others had left him, at last to be deserted for a fair-weather love. It was hard, and she knew that it was hard on her; and do what she would, she could not be this girl's friend. Maurice she had forgiven, because he was Maurice, and it was her lot to forgive him again and yet again; he was her love, and could do no wrong. Even in deserting her, he had been under the wiles and fascinations of Dulcie, and to Dulcie she owed the loss of Maurice.

Alice and Dulcie were this afternoon sitting on the terrace outside the drawing-room windows in the sun-

shine, Mrs. Ingram, Una, and little Maurice and his nurse having gone together for a drive, when the sound of wheels was heard coming through the trees.

"Who can that be?" said they, both looking up from their different occupations. And in another minute or two, a very queer-looking affair was observable, driving in grand style up to the house. It was an odd little box perched high up between some exceedingly large, spiderish-looking, slender wheels, and two horses driven, tandem fashion, by no other than Merton Crawshaw.

If Ruby had been beside her, Dulcie would have laughed, and said, "The heir to the violet satin and gold himself;" but happily recollecting just in time, she merely said, "Oh, young Mr. Crawshaw! Shall we go to the drawing-room, or have him sent out to us?"

"It does not signify which," said Alice indifferently. She did not bestow a second thought on Merton Crawshaw, but she had been fully prepared to agree that he was an interesting young man, after all that she had heard of him, particularly after hearing how much he thought of her, which Camilla had not failed to intimate, being well versed in the byways and turnings of a woman's heart; but, for all that, Alice had seen with her own eyes how he had run after Ruby, that whenever she was present he had ears and eyes for no other, and Alice had been decidedly provoked.

The gentleman on descending from his extraordinary machine, spied them out, as they sat enjoying the sunshine; and instead of going through the house and being planted in the chilly drawing-room to await somebody's pleasure, he mounted the terrace steps and walked round the house to the other side of it.

The two girls who greeted him were fair and pretty as any you might meet in a day's journey, and yet his eyes wandered about as if constantly searching for another figure.

"I hope that your sister did not catch cold the other evening; I am sure that her shawl was not warm enough," remarked Dulcie, for her visitor was sitting in a cane garden chair, sucking the top of his elegant cane, looking

in a melancholy fashion from one shining boot to the other; conversation, he had none.

"Oh, she is quite well, thank you—at least I believe so; I don't know—she didn't say anything. Oh, dear me, no—I quite forgot," he suddenly added; "she's awfully bad, sprained her hand, I mean her foot, I think getting out of the carriage—or tumbled out of bed—I really can't recollect, you know."

Further questioning produced no more satisfactory results; something had evidently happened to his sister, and Dulcie stated her intention of calling at a very early date to inquire.

"Ah, do!" said he with great energy; "I am sure that will do her all the good in the world; cheer her up, you know, and all that sort of thing."

"Are you sure she has not got the measles?" inquired Alice, with such gravity that Dulcie very nearly choked with laughter.

"Oh lor, no! by Jove, I hope not! I say, do you think she has?—catching, and that sort of thing, eh?"

"I never heard of the measles first showing itself by a sprained foot."

"But I don't know whether it is her foot. I only have an impression that I heard that something was the matter with Camilla or somebody. Are measles much about just now?"

Alice was lying lazily back in her chair, the sunshine making blue shadows in her white dress, and playing amongst her pale brown hair. Her long lissom white fingers were teasing the leaves of a bright spring flower. Dulcie thought that she had never seen her looking prettier.

"I am going to the drawing-room to finish copying that song," she said, rising slowly to her full height; "you will find me there," and she walked leisurely and with dignified step along the terrace. It was Mrs. Ingram who had imparted this dignified carriage and step to the girl; while still very young she was exceedingly tall, and Mrs. Ingram succeeded in impressing on her mind the importance of slow and dignified movements,

without which her size and height would have appeared ungainly.

Constant attention and a constant watching of Mrs. Ingram's own movements had brought about a successful result ; so that in spite of her exceeding tallness and large make, Alice Young was a grand-looking, graceful girl. And Dulcie's eyes followed her as she moved along ; and she looked at the heir of Gondeshill to see whether this had made no impression upon him.

But after one glance, he returned to contemplation of his shining boots, finding them apparently all satisfying. Then he looked up, and saw Alice just disappearing into the drawing-room, and he waited until the last fold of her trailing dress had vanished, when he suddenly turned and said to Dulcie, "Oh, eh, Mrs. Ingram, where is your sister?"

"Do you mean Ruby?"

"Yes ; is her name Ruby ? What a jolly name !"

"Ruby went back to Scotland two days ago."

"Nonsense !"

"Yes, indeed, and I miss her terribly."

"Do you mean to tell a fellow that she has really gone to Scotland, all that beastly long way off, and she never said good-by or anything else?"

"I do not know what else you expected her to say. She did not say good-by, because her going away was so suddenly decided on."

"I never heard of such a thing in all my life," said he, dropping his stick and his eyeglass at the same moment and rising to his feet.

Dulcie rose also, and said, "Shall we go into the drawing-room? We shall find Miss Young there."

"No, wait a bit ; don't go in there," and he stooped and recovered his property. "Just tell me a little about your sister. I really am most—most——"

"She has been with me for some time," said Dulcie, "and of course I cannot expect to have her always now ; but I hope she may come again before very long."

"Ah, to be sure. Didn't she leave any message for me?"

"No," said Dulcie, in some surprise.

"Well, one never can tell, you know; but I don't mind telling you, Mrs. Ingram, that I am no end cut up. I must say she was a most charming girl, and I had no idea she thought of going away."

"Shall we go into the drawing-room?" said Dulcie again.

"No, thank you; another day I shall be most delighted to go into the drawing-room, but really I have no more time. Good morning, Mrs. Ingram. I think you said that her name is Ruby?"

Alice Young looked up as Dulcie entered the drawing-room.

"Where is Mr. Crawshaw?" she said, perceiving that she was alone.

"He has gone."

"Gone home?"

"Yes."

Alice went on with her music, and Dulcie went to her room and wrote a long funny letter to Ruby.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THINGS WE CANNOT FORGET.

THE next day was Sunday; and as they sat at breakfast in a bright little corner room, which Dulcie preferred to the large dining-room, which was gloomy in the mornings, they had for the first time that year the windows open to the garden and fresh spring air as they sat at table.

"Mr. Pierrepont, you will come to church with me, wont you?" said Dulcie.

"I shall be must happy to go, if you wish it."

"Now, leave him alone, Dulcie," said Maurice. "I am sure that he would prefer to walk down to the river with me and smoke peaceably."

"No, he would not, Maurice. I will not permit you to try and make him as wicked as yourself. Good people go to church on Sunday morning; they do not

go smoking down by the river. I know what you would do ; you would take the dogs and set them to catch rats down there. I will not have such goings on. Mr. Pierrepont, I so seldom have anybody to go to church with me ; you will go, wont you ?”

“ Yes, certainly I will go,” said he, smiling.

Nevertheless, when Dulcie had left them to dress for church, Maurice did his best to inveigle his guest out of the house under the shady old trees, and from thence towards his favourite lounge, the river side. But Harold Pierrepont, although he would greatly have enjoyed the river side, had given his promise to Dulcie, and he fully intended to abide by it.

There was a short cut to the church through some of their own fields, and Dulcie, who always walked there, greatly preferred this way to the dusty road with the string of church-goers, who on the road thither had apparently nothing else to do but to stare at other people.

“ I suppose there is not a Scotch church in the place,” said he, as they went along.

“ No, but I go to the English church. I like it very much. I must go somewhere, and I cannot go to the Catholic church.”

“ I almost wonder——” Harold Pierrepont began, and then he stopped short.

“ Go on,” said Dulcie. “ But I know what you were going to say. You were going to wonder that I had not turned Roman Catholic, were you not ?”

“ Yes, I was going to say that.”

“ Then I wonder at you, Mr. Pierrepont—you who know Auntie Jean, who brought me up. You know that she always calls it such a slavish belief, and she brought us up to believe as she does.”

“ I wonder, then, at your marrying a Catholic,” he said.

“ Ah, I did not know what it meant then. I had no idea of the influence and power of the priests. I did not know how they ruled each individual and governed the house. How could I possibly have any idea of them ?

Our ministers are so different. They can be our friends and advisers without coming in between every thought and action, before every friend, between husband and wife. But I would do it all over again. I mean I would marry Maurice again knowing all this, for in spite of this trouble, I am very, very happy with him."

Harold Pierrepont guessed from her words what a skeleton this was in the house, in spite of the light way in which she tried to mention it, and he said, "Has the child been christened?"

"Yes," said Dulcie, in a hard voice, "he is christened into the Church of Rome. Do not be astonished; do you think I could help it? What could I do? Maurice said it must be, and Father O'Brian governs him. You do not know what it is in our house. At home they used to say I had such a strong will; but here, I assure you, my will is nowhere. Father O'Brian is very good and kind to me so long as my wishes do not interfere with his; but when that is the case, I am sent to the wall, and treated as a very well-meaning but ignorant child. You see the Ingrams have been Catholics for five generations, and the priests will put up with my being Maurice's wife if his child be christened into their Church."

"Well," said Harold Pierrepont cheerfully, "when he grows up no one can prevent his choosing for himself, and he may wish to be a Protestant."

"He shall be!" said Dulcie, so vehemently that he was astonished.

Then she smiled, and added, "Now I have ended my grumbling—that is, my trouble, and the dark side of my life; but the other side is all bright and beautiful, and I had one year of perfect happiness, for somehow I never felt so worried about the priests till after baby's birth. I do think, Mr. Pierrepont, that nobody in the world could get the better of a priest but Auntie Jean! perhaps *she* could. But we will not talk of them any more. Tell me what you think of Ruby's progress in her drawing."

"She really is making capital progress. At first, after

she lost you, she did not seem to care for that or anything else; and really, at one time, we became quite anxious about her, for she took no interest in anything. However, time, the great worker, brought her round again, and the first thing she showed any interest in was her drawing. I used to have long talks and walks with her, and I persuaded her to try again, as she had been so successful with her first attempts at drawing; and she did try, poor girl, but it was an attempt without any heart in what she was doing, and the results were very poor; but when she saw that I was disappointed in them, she fired up with a new purpose and resolution, and then it was that she began to make decided improvement in her attempts, and she got on with one stride after another so rapidly that I was quite surprised; and really, considering the small amount of tuition that she has had, the drawings are first-rate. I am quite proud of them. They are far, far better than anything that Miss Bell ever did. Even Miss Jean says that they are not so bad as they might be, but she only says this when she feels quite sure that there is no risk of her hearing the praise."

"I always said that Ruby had a talent for drawing, if only somebody would show her how to put it to use," said Dulcie.

"Well, we were all very thankful to her taste for drawing, I can tell you," said Harold Pierrepont. "She was so utterly lost without you, that I do not know of anything else that would have interested her. We really did not know what to do next."

"I never knew that," said Dulcie. "Did she really miss me so much, dear old Ruby?"

"Miss you! who didn't? We all suffered at your absence. Not one of us was the same without you."

"And they never wrote to me!"

"They were all sore and angry, for you treated them very badly. I do not think you could expect that they should forgive you all at once."

"I know that I treated them badly," said Dulcie humbly, "but what could I do? Because, you see, I

loved Maurice more than anybody, and they were all so unkind to us."

"It was all out of kindness, and on account of his religion. They foresaw what you are now suffering from—the rule of the priests; and they feared that, loving your husband as you do, you would become a convert to his belief."

"But they have such a terrible rooted prejudice against Catholics; and then, I could only feel that it was prejudice."

"Still that does not excuse your running away and deceiving them all. I was so very disappointed in you when I heard of it."

"Were you?" said Dulcie, with her eyes full of tears; and then they entered the church.

Considerable curiosity was felt among the congregation as to who the bearded, remarkable-looking, and yet handsome stranger in Mrs. Ingram's pew could be; and it was later in the day decided in the neighbourhood that he must be either a foreign refugee or an artist; an ordinary mortal he certainly could not be.

During the walk home Dulcie turned the conversation on very different topics from those which they had discussed on the way to church.

Once or twice Harold Pierrepont had asked himself by what right did he excuse himself for having so frankly told her that she had behaved badly and disappointed him, and he told himself that he loved her so well that he could not let her rest in ignorance of knowing what he had felt; for he wished her to excuse herself, that he might reinstate her on the high pedestal whereon he had placed her, and where he knew she still would dwell, in spite of all and everything.

Each moment that he was with her he became more convinced of her loveliness; and as he watched Maurice Ingram and noted how entirely happy he and Dulcie were to all appearance, he wondered to himself why that first impression of dislike had crossed him, and still more why it was utterly impossible, even now, for him to shake it off.

At luncheon Dulcie gave Maurice a humorous sketch of Merton Crawshaw's visit of the day before, keeping back all allusions to Ruby, for Mrs. Ingram and Alice were present. Mrs. Ingram said that it certainly was incumbent on them to drive over to Gondeshill, to inquire after Miss Crawshaw.

Maurice instantly said that no mortal thing would get him over to Gondeshill. If any one else particularly desired cramp in every muscle, they might take the little drive. As for himself, he intended to stroll down to the river, and he meant to take Mr. Pierrepont with him, and he strongly recommended Dulcie to come too. Other people must do as they pleased.

"I think if Dulcie and Alice were to drive over it would be a good thing," said Mrs. Ingram; "it is a pleasant day, and they might take the open carriage."

"Dulcie, if you go," said Maurice, "I shall take Ingram, junior, Esquire, down to the river and teach him to swim."

"Maurice, how can you dare to say such a wicked thing?" said Dulcie. It was a dreadful idea this of the long uninteresting drive to Gondeshill, and she sincerely hoped that it would fall to some one else's lot; however, she said, "I should be glad if some one else could go, as I was out this morning. I should not like to be so long away from baby in the afternoon."

"Of course, my dear, I cannot ask you to go if you do not wish it," said Mrs. Ingram, somewhat coldly.

Alice then refused to go. She was offended with the Crawshaws generally, and did not intend to be dragged off to them so constantly, particularly if they did not wish for her company; and she thought of Merton Crawshaw as she spoke.

So that, for that day at any rate, the proposed expedition came to an end; and instead, when luncheon was over, Alice got her garden-hat and gloves, which were to protect the white hands from the sun, and Dulcie fetched her garden-hat and the baby, and with Maurice and Harold Pierrepont they walked along the now dry turf under the trees. Maurice walked slightly in advance,

carrying his son. Where the river passed their fields there was a little boat-house and a couple of boats of theirs, and they were one and all very fond of rowing up and down amongst the trees, reeds, water-lilies, and forget-me-nots. They took their places in the larger of the boats, Alice, Dulcie, and the baby in the stern, and Harold Pierrepont sitting on the floor, on the rolled-up cable in the prow. He said it just fitted his back splendidly, like an armchair, and in truth he looked mightily comfortable, resting back, with the edge of the boat—just the right height to support his arms, which were stretched at full length—on either side. He lighted his pipe and fixed it in his mouth, gave a fresh bend down to his soft brigand hat, and then began to enjoy himself. The river and its banks were all charming, and with the lights and shadows all picturesque and sketchable; and then there were two pretty women in the other end of the boat, so that there was at least every prospect of his enjoying himself, and after his usual manner, he testified his enjoyment by an utter silence.

Maurice had taken the oars, and as he first started he had paused and pulled up each of his sleeves.

"Why did you do that?" said Dulcie.

"To be ready for water-lilies and forget-me-nots and things. You and Alice are sure to want every one you see. Women never like to leave one single flower growing where they see it."

"Don't you make yourself grand about that," said Dulcie. "Men never can see a hare or partridge enjoying itself but they must want to shoot it dead."

They rowed some distance down the river, and then the talk turned into a very constant channel, namely, the new stables.

"I wonder where we shall build them after all," said Dulcie. "I hope you will fix on the place Mr. Pierrepont suggested. I have been thinking it over, and I quite like that spot better than any that has been proposed yet."

"Well, I cannot say that I agree with you," said Alice.

"Well, we must make haste and decide on one place

or another ; the time is going on, and the builder is naturally enough getting impatient ; besides that, I want to have it finished and thoroughly dry before the winter comes on. The old stables are really not fit for the horses during another winter."

"I went round the grounds again yesterday," said Alice, "and I have found out a much better place still. You must come and see it by-and-by."

"Oh, pray do not find out any more places that would do," said Dulcie. "You will puzzle Maurice into a fever on the subject. Maurice, do fix on the spot I have chosen."

"I really do not much care where it is," said he.

And then there came over Alice a desire to try, versus Dulcie, whether she had no influence over Maurice. Years ago she had had some, but now Dulcie's wishes were all that he cared to consult, and her influence the only one which guided him, she said. She did not much care about where they built the stables. She had now little to do with the place, but she would take this opportunity of trying to persuade Maurice to do as she wished. It would be one last dying struggle, and if she failed then she would give it up for evermore, and know that in spite of all that had been between them, and all that she had done and borne for his sake, he cared no more for her and her wishes than if she had been one of the hinges of the old hall-door.

When they again landed at the boat-house, Harold Pierrepont stated his wish to stay and make just a slight pencil-note of the trees about it and the river ; so they left him there and walked on ; but the movement of getting out of the boat woke little Maurice from his slumber, and he screamed lustily. Dulcie turned from the other two, and with him in her arms said that she should take him into the house, at the same time telling the others not to return because she did so.

They stood watching her as she carried away the screaming child, and then Maurice heard Alice say softly—

"Maurice, come with me, I want to show you the spot I have just found for the stables."

"Just as you please, but surely we have sites enough to choose from already; and I say, Alice, I think perhaps Dulcie's wishes should be studied in the matter. Suppose we fix on the spot that she seems to fancy. I think it is as good a place as we could find," and saying this he turned and looked once more at the mother and child, now almost lost in the distance. He waited until they had quite disappeared, and then he turned back to resume his walk with Alice.

But this movement on his part quite decided her. Had every remembrance of the past even left him? Was there no thought for more than one? And as they mounted the hill together she passed her hand into his arm, and began to talk on indifferent matters, and presently she said—

"How long it is, Maurice, since you and I walked together! What a number of things have happened since then! I suppose you never now even remember those old days?"

Maurice had almost forgotten them, and was not altogether comfortable at being reminded of them.

"There are some things which are best forgotten," he said.

"And some things which one cannot forget," she said.

He was silent, and she continued—

"Maurice, did it ever cross you to wonder what I said when I heard that you were married?"

"My dear Alice, this is a very painful subject. I know that you must have thought that I behaved shamefully to you; and knowing this, I did not dare to tell you of the extenuating circumstances. Why have you spoken of this to-day?"

"I spoke of it because I have sometimes thought that all those years must have been a dream to me, for I have seen that you had not one thought, one tenderness for the past. Walking under these trees in the spring-time with you could not but remind me of my dream of

long ago, and I was obliged to ask you if it ever was real."

"Real! it is so long ago, Alice, I thought it was real then, till I met Dulcie, and then I knew that I cared most for her, and it would have been a wrong to marry you feeling this. Why do you make me say this?" And he tried to disengage his arm, but she held him firmly, and said—

"Maurice, forgive me; it is the last time, but remember that it was real to me—so real that I suffered greatly at that letter of yours. Oh, Maurice, why did you not write to me and break off our engagement? Surely it was due to me. I could have forgiven it then," and there was a sound in her throat which shocked and touched Maurice.

"Alice, don't! for heaven's sake, don't!" he said.

"Have sometimes a thought, a word for me," she continued. "You never think of any one but Dulcie, and has she done for you what I have? Remember, Maurice, that I clung to you when every one else turned away. When your father forbade me to think of ruining my life by marrying you, I still said I would be your wife. I interceded for you, and prayed for you, I thought only of you; and oh, Maurice! have you now, after all this, no one thought for me?"

"Alice, I was grateful. I knew for how much I had to thank you, and I blessed you in my heart. But Alice, I was then, I think, altogether unworthy. My brain was in a whirl. I had almost forgotten how to discern right from wrong. Now I am a different man—a new creature."

"Now?"

"Yes, since my marriage."

"Ah, that is Dulcie's doing again."

"I know not whose doing it is. I spend my time in thankfulness for the present and deepest sorest regret for the past; but what has been remains. We cannot root it out or efface it from the history of our lives. All we can do, Alice, is—to forget."

Then they walked on in silence till she said, "Here

Maurice, here is where I propose that you build your new stables."

And only too delighted at the change in the conversation, he plunged eagerly into the new theme.

"I think it is a first-rate idea," he said at last, "and if it were not that Dulcie seems to wish that other place, I should be much inclined to agree with you in your choice."

"Dulcie does not care one bit where the stables are. She said so," answered Alice; "and I do wish you would have them here."

"And why, may I ask," said he laughingly, "do you so particularly wish for them to be built in this particular spot?"

Alice coloured, and then she gently laid her beautiful white hand on his arm, "Because I have taken a fancy that the stables would be well placed and convenient here, and I want you to say yes, they shall be built here, just to show Alice that her wishes are still of some importance, some little weight with you. Say yes, Maurice; not only because I ask it as a favour—and it is the last I will beg of you—but indulge my fancy and build them here in memoriam of long ago. Say yes, Maurice," and she looked into his face tenderly and beseechingly.

We know that Maurice was weak and indecisive at the best of times, more particularly when he was run to earth. "I think we might build them here," he said; "but I will ask Dulcie. I don't suppose, as you say, that she would much mind;" and he turned about as if to return to the house.

"No, no, Maurice; I am not going to let you put it off, or it will never be accomplished. Surely, Maurice, after what I have said I need not ask again. Have you not sufficient authority in your own house to say what is to be done? Surely it only rests with you when I ask you to grant me a favour," and she drew herself up somewhat coldly.

"Really, Alice, you are talking nonsense," he said. "As you make such a great point of it, you force me to say 'Yes;' only I like to consult her wishes; so I must

tell Dulcie that you particularly wished me to have them built here to please you."

"Thank you, Maurice;" and all the way up to the house she exerted herself to please him, and all the time there was a glow on her cheek and a sparkle in her eye; done with ill-grace as it was, she had accomplished her task, and was returning laden with success.

Maurice, in the meantime, felt that a dead weight had been thrown over his spirits, that Alice had taken an undue advantage over him, and that Dulcie would have every right to be displeased, if she did not agree in the choice of the ground; but his word was pledged, and he must not again go back from it.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WHEN HE MARRIED YOU.

In the meantime Dulcie was spending a not over pleasant time in the drawing-room with Una. Una was particularly ill-tempered that afternoon. She enjoyed driving excessively, and would have liked the drive over to Gondeshill, and she laid all the blame of her disappointment on Dulcie.

"Have you put the wonderful baby to sleep?" she inquired as Dulcie entered the room.

"Yes, poor dear. He behaved beautifully all the afternoon on the water, but when he woke up he got tired and hungry; it was enough to make anybody scream."

"Do you think he wouldn't have been just as contented with his nurse in the afternoon?"

"Possibly; but I should not have been as contented."

"Perhaps if Mr. Pierrepont had been going over to Gondeshill, you would not have objected so much to go too!"

"I do not understand you!"

"Nothing easier, when one does not wish to understand."

"Una, you forget yourself," said Dulcie, sternly.

"Well, I would rather go with Alice in the carriage to Gondeshill," said Una, "even if you had to put up with my society, than send Alice and Maurice walking out together in the woods—that is, if I had been in your place."

"What is the matter with you, Una? Has any one offended you? If I have done so, it is unintentionally, and I am very sorry."

"So you think I am in a bad temper, do you?" and Una waxed hot and red. An accusation about her temper always shot home, and upset her more than anything else ever did. "What right have you to scold me?" she continued. "You think because you are Maurice's wife you may do and say what you please, but you are mistaken. You are a heretic, and we all hate you, and perhaps Maurice may too some day."

"Una, hold your tongue!" said Dulcie. "You are speaking recklessly, and saying cruel wicked things."

But this storm against Dulcie had been brewing up since that first moment when she had heard of the marriage, and it was impossible to prevent herself from uttering the words she had been for so long burning to say.

"How can you talk of wrong and wickedness?" she said. "What do you consider your marriage with Maurice?"

"It was not, at any rate, wrong and wickedness; but whatever it was, you are not asked to give an opinion on the matter."

"No, I believe no one's opinion was asked in the matter—not even Alice's."

"I scarcely knew of Alice's existence at the time; and I shall be glad if you will discontinue the subject, Una."

"Do not talk nonsense; do not pretend that you knew nothing of Alice."

"I simply mean what I say; and as you will not do as I ask, and discontinue the conversation, I must leave the room;" and Dulcie turned away, when Una called out—

"Stop!"

"What?" said Dulcie, looking round.

"Stop one moment. Listen. Did you not know that Maurice was engaged to be married to somebody else when he married you?"

And Dulcie did stop, and she remained where she was for one moment, and then she came slowly back, saying, "Take care what you are saying, Una. Do you mean what you have said?"

"I simply mean what I say," said Una, imitating Dulcie's manner of a moment ago. "I mean that when you and Maurice ran away and got married somehow somewhere, you stole away another girl's lover; for he was engaged to be married to Alice—engaged, as he had been to her for years."

Dulcie, with her hands hanging down by her sides, stood where the blow had reached her, as if she had been turned to stone.

"Engaged to Alice!" she said. "I do not believe you, Una."

"Thanks. You can do as you please about that."

Whilst they were thus standing, Maurice and Alice entered the room through one of the open windows; but Dulcie stood still in the same position.

"Some news to tell!" cried Alice, brightly, as she entered the room. "We have fixed upon a place for the stables—quite a new position; one I have just discovered. I am so glad that Maurice is going to indulge me by choosing my site in preference to any one else's."

"Dulcie," said Maurice, "I fully meant to have taken the place of your choice, but Alice has begged so hard, and put it as a favour to her, that I have promised that it shall be as she wishes."

Una looked with triumph at Dulcie, but she had not yet recovered the power of speech, and Maurice went up to her and took one of her hands.

"Dulcie," he said, "what are you thinking about, old lady?"

Dulcie drew her hand away, and then slowly turned from him and passed out of the room.

He waited a few minutes, hovering about in an un-

decided manner, and suddenly he rushed to the door, opened it, and swinging it noisily to, flew up the broad old staircase.

"Is anything the matter?" inquired Alice, turning to Una.

"I do not know," said Una, sulkily; but an anxious look began to steal over her face. What had she done in her anger? She had broken her solemn promise to Alice. She had probably made irrevocable mischief amongst them all, and she began to regret her hasty and violent passion; but as Maurice had said shortly before to Alice, "What has been remains," and it was all impossible to recall spoken words. Our speech remains, whether to eat into the heart and corrode in silence there, or to be a sweet green spot to return to, and to rest in, even amid storms and trouble; but it never quite perishes—it is with us for evermore. And Una felt this as she sat in sulky silence.

Maurice had hurried away up the staircase into Dulcie's room. He saw her standing in the window, looking out over the distance. She did not turn as he came in, only when he came up beside her and laid his hand on her shoulder she turned and looked up into his face, and said, without any warning—

"Maurice, is it true that you were engaged to marry Alice when you married me?"

His hand left her shoulder as if she had been burning metal.

"Who has told you this?" he said.

"Oh, never mind that, Maurice. It only signifies now to know if it be true."

Maurice threw himself down in an armchair, and covered his eyes with his hand whilst he thought.

Dulcie knelt beside him, and pulled the hand away from his eyes, and again placed it on her shoulder.

"Maurice, tell me, was it true?"

"It was," said he, hardly and sternly.

She only leant forward and laid her head on his shoulder, and whilst his arms went round her, she whispered, "You should have told me, Maurice."

And they said not another word, until he could bear the silence no more, and he said impatiently, "Speak, Dulcie; blame me; tell me I have acted shamefully; only say something."

"I have no more to say, Maurice. I should like to have known of it, even afterwards."

"Dulcie, you are too good to me. Listen. My mother made up this match when we were very young. I was very fond of Alice for years. We had been like brother and sister, and I was ill and miserable, and only too thankful that she was not against me, like the rest of the world. This went on till I met you, and then came the love of my life. I did not know that it was in me to love as I loved you; and I felt that it would be a sin to marry Alice, for I could never care for her in that way. I wrote to my mother, hinting this plainly; but she was angry, and refused to receive what I had said; and then, Dulcie, I only felt that I must have you, at all and at any risks, and that is the history of our marriage. Can you forgive me, darling? have you forgiven me?"

"Yes, Maurice, I have forgiven you; I love you too much not to forgive you. I have not recovered from the shock yet; that will take some time; but my love will bring me through that in time. Now, Maurice, our duty is with Alice. We must be good to her; we must try to make her happy with everything that lies in our power."

When Harold Pierrepont had finished his sketch, he returned, and also in plenty of time for dinner; and he went through his meal most comfortably, without having any idea of what had taken place in the house during his absence. And so it is in our daily life. Storms may sweep over and leave barren the life of our nearest neighbour, and we standing looking on know no more and feel no more than the passing bird or butterfly. Perchance, at some long distant day, we may be told of what tragedies happened, all unknown, long ago; and we say, "Was it then, when we fancied all was bright and clear, when we spoke lightly to them, little dreaming that beneath the smooth clear surface there was a

troubled deep, which even at the moment threatened to upset and wreck the bark?"

Before Dulcie went to bed that night Una was waiting for her, and waylaid her at the door of her room; and with trembling and unsteady voice she implored Dulcie not to tell Alice and Maurice what she had revealed that evening. "I promised them never to tell you, and I do not know what they will say when they know that I have broken my word. I am so very very sorry for my passion. Please forgive me; and oh! do not repeat my words."

"I have already told Maurice," she said; "but you may rest assured that I shall tell no one else, and Maurice will never speak of it again."

"Thank you. But are you sure that Maurice will never tell them?"

"He will not, if I beg him not to do so. Of course I told him of it, Una; it would have made me miserable for life to have kept it from him; in fact, I could not have lived with that knowledge and said nothing of it to Maurice. If ever you marry, Una, do not let a miserable suspicion come between you and your husband. If any one says aught against him, go and say to him, "I have heard this thing; is it true?"

"If I marry!" said Una, bitterly.

"Well, and why not?" said Dulcie gently. "That which you think of is so very slight, it need not stand in your way. Good night, Una; we are never going to quarrel again, are we?"

And Una went to bed feeling greatly softened towards Dulcie, and grateful for her forgiveness and kind words.

Harold Pierrepont remained with them for two days longer, then said that he must not be idle any more. Business was waiting for him in London; and as this pleasant country life at Hunstanleigh was only giving him a distaste for work, it was high time that he should be off.

Even Mrs. Ingram was sorry to say good-by to him. His pleasant easy manner, his original remarks, and his funny stories made him a most agreeable companion;

besides which there had been much interest about him in the neighbourhood, and Mrs. Ingram had told her friends that he was a distinguished artist, who was rising daily in public estimation since his return from many years spent abroad.

"When will you come again?" said Dulcie. "Do come before very long. We have all enjoyed your visit so much. Can you fix any time?"

"I have enjoyed myself excessively," he said, "and you may fully depend on my return before very long. I should like much to make some sketches about that pretty little river of yours down yonder, it is a first-rate background for figures. But as to naming any time, why I cannot do that. Artists are queer fellows, and do not like to feel themselves tied to time, whatever the reason be; but if you will only let me leave your invitation open, and trust to the happy 'chance' which you say hovers about me, I shall be only too happy to come back when I see my way."

"Very well, Mr. Pierrepont, come when you can; we shall be always pleased to have you."

It was not until after his departure that they took Dulcie to see the site for the stables which Alice had chosen. It was half-way up the hill which led to the house. There was a small plateau of level ground, and between the opening trees a pretty peep over the surrounding country.

"Oh no, not here!" cried Dulcie, under the first impulse that crossed her; "oh, it would be a sin and a shame to build the stables here. This is one of my favourite bits of the grounds, there is such a pretty peep through the trees. I was going to ask Maurice to build a rustic summer-house here. Oh, do not spoil it, by putting stables here!"

There fell then a silence over them. Maurice threw his cigar away, and vowed to himself that the whole affair connected with the stables was going to turn out a confounded nuisance; and was on the point of making up his mind to give up the notion of new stables altogether, and let the horses flourish or go to the bad, as

the case might prove, in the old ones. And Alice, who perhaps knew Maurice's failings better than Dulcie did, looked a little anxiously at him. Dulcie was evidently against her. What would Maurice do?

Dulcie had, however, scarcely spoken thus when something crossed her mind, and she remembered her own words to Maurice, that it would be their place to do all that they could to please Alice. If she had set her mind on having the stables built here, why after all it did not much signify to Dulcie. If it would gratify her, why let them be built here.

"Maurice," said Dulcie, "come and look at the view from here." And as they walked away, Alice, with a flush on her cheek, observed that Dulcie spoke eagerly, whilst he listened attentively.

"Now," thought Alice, "it is battle to the teeth; she is persuading him to throw over his promise to me to gratify some little whim of hers. Never mind, I should be used to it now; it will not be the first time that he has thrown me over and trampled on his promises. She will succeed, of course she will. I know Maurice Ingram better even than you do, Dulcie; and I know that whatever influence is brought to bear on him, he will bend like a reed in the wind; run him to earth, and you may walk over him."

Alice sat herself down on one of the huge stones which lay about the place rising out of the ground, and thought bitterly of past and present.

In a few minutes, Maurice and Dulcie, together and smiling, returned to her side.

"We have been talking over the matter of the stables," said Dulcie, "and Maurice says that although he had thought of another site, he is quite ready to give it up, or do anything rather than you should imagine that your wishes had no weight with him; so he is going to settle at once on this place, and I quite agree with him. Indeed, I think the stables will look quite lovely here; we shall be always bringing people here to show off our wonderful stables."

Alice was speechless. What did it all mean? She

sat still, without saying one word. She was dimly conscious that Maurice was walking round and examining the spot, and saying, "We shall have to get rid of these great stones or rocks, and perhaps cut down a few trees; but I daresay it will do capitally."

What had wrought this change, and how it had all come about was a mystery to Alice; the victory was won, but in some uncanny manner, and it did not bring the expected satisfaction with it.

CHAPTER XL.

DEAD CALM BEFORE STORM.

MRS. INGRAM, Una, and Alice were all going to stay with Lady Laurence in London; and the time was near at hand for the proposed visit; and Dulcie, in her heart of hearts, was rejoicing in the prospect of the quiet house, which would only be occupied by Maurice, herself, and the baby.

Before they went, however, they all knew that the site for the stables, about which there had been such disputes and difficulties, was now altogether decided and fixed on, and they all knew, and all the neighbourhood knew, that rocks were to be blasted and trees cut down on the small level plateau chosen on the hill by Miss Young, and that everybody's opinions, including Mr. Ingram's and his wife's, had been put on one side to gratify a whim of Miss Young's, and surprise was expressed.

In these last days a friendship had sprung up between Una and Dulcie, originating in Una's gratitude for the kindness she had received from Dulcie, as well as her promise not to let Mrs. Ingram and Alice know how she had betrayed a secret and broken her word; and Dulcie, observing that Una wished to be friends, did her utmost to encourage and strengthen the feeling. From the first moment, Una had felt a strange desire to tell Dulcie this secret; and now that the deed was done, and the weight off her mind, she was willing to let Dulcie like her and

make much of her ; and once liking Dulcie, a great reaction in that direction set in, and before she started for her London visit she declared that there was no one like Dulcie, and it was a new and delightful pleasure to her to be constantly dwelling on her merits and beauty, and descanting to Alice at great length on these points.

So they started for London ; and for the whole journey Una entertained Alice with tales of Dulcie's goodness and Maurice's devotion to her.

While the train was speeding along its distant way, Dulcie was dancing about the garden at Huustanleigh, full of delight at having got rid of everybody.

"They even thought it odd my liking to carry the baby about the garden without the nurse," thought she, "but I do not care what they think now," as she ran down the terrace steps with him, and danced off under the big old trees, to seat herself in their pleasant shade ; and putting the baby down beside her to let him eat bits of earth, or his fists, or amuse himself in any way he pleased, she rested against some gnarled old roots, and opened a book, and began to read and enjoy herself.

It was weeks and weeks since she had felt so light-hearted and happy. She had had the pleasure of Uncle Donald and Ruby's society. But even that had been something of an anxiety ; she had been so anxious that all things should go well, and that they should enjoy themselves ; and then she knew that even Harold Pierrepont had been taking notes to write his account of everything to Miss Jean and the folks in the island.

The visit of Mrs. Ingram, Una, and Alice had turned out certainly better than she had ventured to hope for ; at any rate it was all over now, and she and Maurice were alone to do what they pleased without any one to give an opinion on their proceedings.

"Hullo !" said a voice, "what have you been up to all the morning since they left ?"

"Enjoying myself, Maurice."

"Lucid explanation ! What does enjoying yourself consist in ?"

"Dancing under the trees with baby, rolling him about

on the grass, resting on these old roots, and reading, and knowing all the time that there was nobody about but you and me and baby—that was enjoyment.”

“Well, I never!” said he, throwing himself down on the grass at her feet, and twisting the baby round. “Come, leave off, you little beggar. If you are going to grin in that senseless fashion, you should first get teeth, and be made beautiful for ever. Shut your mouth and don’t laugh, do you hear?”

Not until the baby became cross and sleepy did they carry him off to the house, for it was luncheon time.

“Maurice,” said Dulcie then, “you and I will go for a drive this afternoon, but we will not go to Gondeshill,” and she laughed. “Then we will come home to dinner; and after dinner, in the evening, we will go down the river, it is so warm and pleasant, and it is quite light enough now to go on the river after dinner.”

“All right; but I ought to be looking after those men who are getting the place ready for building.”

“I thought the four trees were cut down already.”

“Yes, but they are now preparing to blast those rocks, they are too large to move otherwise.”

“But they are not doing anything particular this afternoon,”

“Yes, they are; they are making little holes in them where they will be blasted to-morrow.”

“Well, I am sure they do not want you; they can do perfectly well without you. I intend you to take an entire holiday, and be out with me all day; to-morrow we will both return to business and work.”

And he yielded; and together they drove through the pretty fresh green lanes, enjoying the sunshine and summer air.

“We shall soon have roses and summer time,” said Dulcie; “to-morrow will be the 1st of June. What a happy day this is, Maurice! I shall remember this date.” And in days to come she did remember it.

In the evening they rowed carelessly through the water-lilies on the river, each taking an oar and playing one another all manner of tricks; they laughed and sang,

and were light-hearted as two children holiday-making. The sun had long gone down, and it was turning to dark night as Maurice and Dulcie entered at the drawing-room window from the terrace.

"Oh, Maurice, this has been a perfect day!" said Dulcie, and the window was closed.

The 1st of June rose brilliantly and clear; the birds were singing, and the sun shining warmly on the buds and coaxing them into full perfection. The blinds were half down, and everything looked bright and cosy in the corner room where Maurice and Dulcie sat at breakfast.

"What is that?" said Dulcie suddenly.

A great boom, like an explosion or the sound of houses falling, came breaking and crashing through the still morning air.

"Hang those fellows! What a confounded lot of fools they are!" cried Maurice, rising to his feet.

"What is it, dear?"

"Why, the rocks; and I gave strict orders that the blasting was not to be commenced until I was there. I particularly wished to see it done! Besides, people are so apt to be careless, and it is a thing which requires the utmost caution. I must be off at once."

"Just finish your breakfast, Maurice dear, it will not take you long; do now."

But he only stayed to finish his cup of coffee, and hurried out of the room, and in a few minutes more Dulcie saw him pass the window outside on the terrace, and descending the steps, hurry across the lawn, the shortest way towards the scene of the operations.

She went about her business, and the morning sped on, the stillness broken every now and then by the great explosions which were tearing the rocks asunder and heaving them in pieces from the earth. The sound disturbed her and woke the baby, and she said to herself that she should be glad when that most unpleasant part of the proceedings was over.

By-and-by a visitor's card was brought to her. It bore the inscription, "Mr. Merton Crawshaw, Gondeshill."

"I suppose he has come over to lunch," said Dulcie to herself. "I did not want him, but I suppose I must make the best of him. I will send him out to find Maurice."

Mr. Merton Crawshaw had come over to luncheon, and he would have liked to sit quietly in the drawing-room which he had refused to enter a few days ago, and ask questions about Ruby, and whether she had not even yet sent him any message.

"I took a great fancy to that girl," he was saying to himself. "I don't know, I am sure, why I took such a fancy to her, but I did, and I really am sorry that she should have left in this, eh—sudden fashion."

Young Mrs. Ingram did not seem inclined to sit in the drawing-room talking about her sister or anything else. She rather startled him by asking him whether he would like to go out to her husband. There was some blasting going on, and Maurice was interested in it; probably he would like to see it too. And whilst he was fixing his eyeglass, which had again fallen out, and mumbling indistinctly, Dulcie rang the bell, and ordered the servant who appeared to show Mr. Crawshaw the way to the new building, and to find Mr. Ingram.

She then added, "Then I shall see you again at lunch, Mr. Crawshaw. You will come in with Maurice when the bell rings."

And Merton Crawshaw found himself following the servant across the lawn almost before he knew where he was, and Dulcie laughed to herself and ran upstairs into the nursery. "Really," she thought, "it is a mercy that dear old Ruby is not here; for her own sake it is a mercy."

In a little while another great explosion was heard. "Surely that must be the last; it is time the men were going home to dinner. I wish that they would make haste in now. I am quite ready for them." She waited a little longer, and then she thought that she might as well go to meet them; so she got her large garden-hat, and passed out on to the terrace through the open window, and was just about to descend the steps when

she was stopped by Merton Crawshaw, who suddenly appeared, coming along from the left towards the steps. He stopped abruptly, and she said—

“I was just coming to see after you and Maurice. Where is he?”

“He is coming presently; but don’t go, Mrs. Ingram, he does not wish you to go there.”

And then Dulcie saw that he was trembling all over, and that his lips were white.

“Mrs. Ingram, do not be alarmed, but in that last blast there was an accident—not fatal, but serious—and the man is injured. They are going to bring him here. Wont you go in out of the way?”

“Poor fellow! who can it be? Has any one sent for the doctor? I will go and see about it at once, also about getting a room ready for him somewhere.”

Dulcie ran off to order one of the servants to go on horseback for the doctor without a moment’s delay. She then called the housekeeper, and told her that there had been an accident, one of the workmen hurt, and they were going to bring him into the house.

There were some unused rooms amongst the servants’ bedrooms, and she ran up the back staircase, intending to select a room for the reception of the wounded man. She was, however, followed closely everywhere she went by Merton Crawshaw, who kept passing his handkerchief over his damp face.

There were sounds of many footsteps in the corridor which led by a baize door from the rooms where they were standing, and Dulcie opened this door quickly, saying as she looked out—

“They are making a mistake; they should have brought him to this part of the house. They are going into my room!” she cried. “What are they about?”

A sound made her turn round to see what it could be. Merton Crawshaw seeing a chair standing by, had sat down suddenly and quietly fainted away, and had then fallen to the floor. The housekeeper and one of the servants were near at hand, and together they all did their best to bring him to, and this occupied Dulcie’s

attention for some time. At the first signs of returning animation she bethought herself of the accident and the strange mistake that the men were making, and she opened and passed through the baize door and on into her room.

On the threshold she met the butler. "Oh, ma'am, we were just coming for you."

Dulcie passed him in greatest surprise and indignation and looked into the room. There on the bed lay a helpless looking figure, with people about him. She passed along the room, made her way through those standing about, and looked at the senseless features of the wounded man. One half glance confirmed the sickening terror that had been creeping over her. It was Maurice whom they had carried in, and were trying the little that they knew to bring him to.

And they wondered at her utter silence ; but Dulcie was not a woman to scream with fright. She threw herself beside him and raised his head and unfastened his collar, and then with every particle of colour gone from her face, she looked round for help. "Give him something—whisky," she gasped under her breath.

This was the one and first thought that came to her. In the Highlands people put their faith in whisky, and whether it be for outward or inward application at any time or under any circumstance, whisky is looked upon as the standing and certain cure.

But those about her had not this same faith, and they said, "No, it will not do ; brandy might do."

"Bring it then," she said.

Then Merton Crawshaw, very pale and trembling, appeared amongst the lookers-on beside the bed.

"Bring brandy ; oh, bring something ; quick ! quick !" whispered Dulcie.

And Merton Crawshaw echoed, "Yes, bring brandy or something, quick. Mrs. Ingram, do pray come away, you can do no good."

"Leave me. Oh, Mr. Crawshaw, go for the doctor, go ! let everybody go. He may be away from home. Search for him, and bring him without losing one

moment! Go." And he tottered out of the room, being very unsteady on his legs after his fainting fit; and Dulcie bent over Maurice, feeling so terribly helpless. They brought brandy, but his mouth was shut, and they did not know how to make him take it. A chill deadly fear had crept over Dulcie. Was he dead? To all appearance, and for all she knew, he might be even now lying dead in her arms; but she could not frame her lips even to ask the question of those about her. They could do nothing but wait until the doctor arrived.

That terrible, terrible time of waiting! Dulcie despatched one after the other nearly all the servants in turn to search for and meet the doctor. She almost felt that if she were to go herself, she would travel on wings and find him and bring him even yet, before the others could.

She heard a step outside the door, and she knew that it was the doctor. Each step of his seemed to tread on her brain, and then they said to her, "Here is the doctor," but she knew it before they told her, and the others moved away and left room for him to approach beside Maurice, only Dulcie kept her place, and looked without a word into the doctor's face.

He bent over him for a few minutes, and then searching in his pocket for something, he looked up and said, "Bring brandy."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE CRUEL CREEPING MIST.

MERTON CRAWSHAW had met the doctor driving up the hill to Hunstanleigh, and he had hastily given him an outline of the accident, turning back and accompanying the doctor on his way during the recital, so that not one moment might be lost. He was, however, so much shaken and so nervous that he had after all but an indistinct notion of how it had come about. There was to be but one more large stone or rock blasted, and Maurice

had been showing the plan of proceedings to Merton Crawshaw; when all was arranged, and every one went to some distance from the spot, Maurice and Merton Crawshaw had become separated. And then, added he, "Ingram, it seems, called out to me that I was still too near; but I did not know that he was speaking to me; and then he ran over to me and pulled me along, when there was a great shout from the others, and Ingram seemed to receive a violent shock, and in one second he was lying in a senseless heap at my feet. A large piece of stone had struck his shoulder. Oh, Lord! the fright I got! I shall never get over it!" and the unfortunate young man leant back in the doctor's carriage, and covered his face with his hands, and shook and trembled from head to foot.

Doctor Munday, a new practitioner in Rolingstoke, who had stepped into the practice of a favourite and popular old doctor lately dead, looked at the heir of Gondeshill, who, shaking and trembling like a blanc-mange, presented but a sorry spectacle of manliness. "Your nervous system has received a severe shock," he said. "You must be looked after. In the meantime, take this," said he, producing a flask; "it will steady your nerves a little."

He bade him rest in the drawing-room, and later in the afternoon, when he left his patient, he took away Merton Crawshaw and drove him in his carriage to Gondeshill.

"How did you get over to Hunstanleigh this morning?" he said, when they were near Gondeshill.

"How did I get over? I don't know. Why, drove over in my trap, of course."

"What have you done with it?"

"Haven't the faintest idea," was the answer.

"Shall I make inquiries when I return?"

"Don't care," said Merton Crawshaw.

Dr. Munday delivered up her son into the care of Mrs. Crawshaw, telling her that a serious and sudden accident had occurred over at Hunstanleigh; that although no lives were lost, her son, who had been on

the spot at the time, had received such a shock to his nervous system that he was not himself at all, and that he should call on the morrow to see how he was, and, if necessary, to prescribe for him, and in the meantime they must let him be quiet, and not ask him too many questions.

It was a long, long time before Maurice was restored to consciousness; and when he came to himself, the wound on his shoulder had been dressed, and slowly he recognised Dulcie, Doctor Munday, and Father O'Brian.

"There!" whispered Doctor Munday, "we have brought him round, and sooner than I expected. Give him brandy."

The cordial gave him strength, and he moved his eyes, and looked inquiringly into Dulcie's face.

"Don't speak, darling; don't be frightened. Everything is all right," she said.

His large black eyes looked darker than ever, as they looked up from the dead-white face at her. "Dulcie," he whispered with difficulty.

"Now, Maurice, didn't I tell you not to talk?" she said. "Lie still, and get strong again."

Then he made a faint movement as if to raise himself, and Dr. Munday interposed with, "Now, Mr. Ingram, do not attempt to move; do not try to think about anything now. There is plenty of time for that by-and-by."

Maurice's eyes closed, and Dulcie in fresh affright looked into the doctor's face, thinking that he was going to lose consciousness again. But he motioned her to be still, and in another moment or two Maurice sighed, and again his eyes opened and travelled round the room, and rested again on Dulcie's face. He then moved his hand towards her, which she took. "Speak," he said.

And Dulcie, who was sitting on the edge of the bed, laid her head on the pillow, and said, "You were hurt, Maurice, and you fainted, so we had to send for the doctor, and get you into bed, and now you have come to again; only Doctor Munday does not wish you to talk

or move, because he has dressed your shoulder so nicely, and you must not disturb it."

He was too weak to talk himself, and again a silence fell over them. And the shadows were beginning to lengthen across the lawn when Dr. Munday left them.

"I will return at eleven o'clock to-night," he said, "to dress the shoulder again. In the meantime, keep him still and silent, give him brandy twice between now and then, and at any time that he seems weak or sinking."

So the doctor left them, to report to the household the promising state of the master, and to take Merton Crawshaw on to Gondeshill. So Dulcie was left to take care of Maurice, with the alternate assistance of the housekeeper and the Scotch cook, and Father O'Brian, who from his first arrival would not leave the bedside. And Dulcie would have given worlds if he would have gone away. The housekeeper was not a great favourite of hers, and she could equally well have dispensed with her services; but it was the Scotch cook, with her ungainly figure and high cheek-bones, who proved to be Dulcie's greatest comfort and stay, and who now came out grandly showing that she knew how to manage "wi' sick folk."

The housekeeper's little bustling figure, with her rustling silk dress, grated on Dulcie's and Maurice's nerves as she entered the room, however good her intentions might be. She begged and entreated Dulcie to leave the bedside and come and eat something which she had provided for her in the dining-room.

"You have eaten nothing, ma'am, since breakfast-time, and it is night now. Do let me persuade you to come."

In spite of her entreaties and of Father O'Brian's, Dulcie said, "Not yet; by-and-by," and remained where she was, and the housekeeper turned and left the room,

Almost before her rustling skirts had passed the threshold, the tall, bony figure of the Scotch cook passed her noiselessly, the big square feet touching the floor almost tenderly, for she had come to love this *bonnie* young mistress of hers; but the feeling was

hidden deep down in her loyal, undemonstrative heart, only to be produced when time and circumstance should require it.

She had been kind to her in word and deed, but there was something else that had even as great a weight as this with the Scotch cook. The mistress, who was amongst strangers and papists and in trouble, was a countrywoman. And she passed the housekeeper, and gently brought to Dulcie's side a tray, bearing the refreshments which she should have had long ago.

"I ken fine that ye'll no leave him," she said, "but ye'll jist tak that, noo."

And with great distaste for her food, Dulcie began to eat; finding, however, as she continued, that she could eat and be the better for it.

"Noo! did I no tell ye?" said the cook, in triumph. She had been standing over her while she was eating, and now, satisfied that Dulcie had eaten properly and enough, she again disappeared noiselessly with her tray.

When Dr. Munday returned at eleven o'clock, he found Maurice feeling better, and he again dressed the wound in the shoulder, which he said was progressing favourably. Some one, he said, must sit up with him; but he strongly advised Dulcie to lie down, as she sorely needed rest after the fatigues and troubles of the long, weary day.

Father O'Brian said that he would at any rate sit up half the night by Maurice; and Dulcie, with the jealousy that was for ever ceaseless with regard to him, then declared she was not in the least fatigued, and that she certainly could and should sit up during the night. Persuasions and inducements alike failed, and they did not know what to do next, for they all felt that she must not be allowed to over-fatigue herself, when the cook, who had perhaps a clearer insight into things than the others, declared that she was perfectly accustomed to sitting up. "I was going to sit up downstairs, in case that anything would be required; and I will just sit up in the room, and give him his drinks and things, if ye please," she

said. And to Dulcie she whispered, "I'll no leave him to thon creature. Go you tae your bed noo."

And when Dulcie had visited the nursery, where she had heard that the baby was declaiming against things in general, she did retire to rest, only too thankful that her terrible fears of the morning had been relieved, and that, although there might be a long time of anxiety and nursing, there was no immediate danger.

There was much improvement in Maurice on the following morning. The wound in the shoulder was evidently preparing to heal healthily and quickly. Doctor Munday said that there was not the slightest cause for uneasiness on that score; and that he quite enjoyed dressing it, it was so satisfactory to see the wound yielding so readily and well to the remedies applied to it.

Dulcie was fain to be contented and deeply thankful. And the days went on—warm summer days, which brought daily improvement to the sufferer; and Dulcie, and Father O'Brian, and the other members of the household, gave all their time to nursing him back to health; the Scotch cook surpassed herself by the cunning dishes which she served up for the invalid's delectation.

Although he progressed rapidly, so far as his wound was concerned, there was a great weakness left on him. It seemed difficult for him to recover strength. "You must give him brandy every few hours; do not neglect this," said Doctor Munday. "The shoulder-wound is nearly healed; it is progressing so rapidly that the stimulant will not irritate it; but we must fight off this continued weakness, and brandy is the thing to do it."

At length he came downstairs, slowly and with help; and as he got stronger, they took him out under the trees, that the fresh sweet air might do its part in the recovery.

"What a noise they are making down there!" he said one day.

"Yes, dear, it is the new building; they are getting on capitally and losing no time with it," was the answer.

"How hot it is !" said he wearily. "I am tired. What are you giving me?"

"Brandy, to make you strong, Maurice."

"Don't give me brandy," he said, turning his head away and shuddering. "You are always giving it to me. I have had enough now."

And she did not give it to him then. But by-and-by she poured out some more. "Now, Maurice, take this ; I think you must."

He looked at it silently, and then his eyes travelled all round the garden, and then back to Dulcie.

"Do take it, dear !"

After another long strange look at the glass of brandy, he suddenly seized it and drank it off. "It's a good thing, Dulcie ; it gives one life, after all," he said, in an altered tone ; adding, "I think I shall be able to walk about as usual in a day or two. But I should have been nowhere without that brandy ; should I, Dulcie?"

"It is a wonderful cure," said Dulcie, "and has given you strength more than anything."

Dulcie had enough to do in these days, what with constantly attending on Maurice, and trying to comfort the baby, who did not approve of having so little of her time ; and his nursery was moved further away, so that his complaining tones should not disturb Maurice. So that, between the two, Dulcie was fairly worked to death, as she laughingly said.

"Dulcie, if I take your arm," said Maurice one day, "I think I could get down to the building."

So they went down together when Maurice had taken his brandy. "By-the-by," he said, when they were going along, "we ought to have had a grand ceremony over laying the foundation-stone. They are always doing wrong things about those stables. I am beginning to hate them."

"Oh, Maurice ! I think they will be beautiful when they are finished. Still, they will always remind me of our terrible accident."

The building had considerably progressed, and the men were one and all delighted to observe Maurice once

more out and amongst them ; and shortly after this first visit he was able to go about without any assistance.

"I consider him really out of my hands now," said Doctor Munday.

"And how about the brandy, doctor?"

"Oh, as he feels inclined about that. The necessity for it is past now."

He was getting over it splendidly, and Dulcie wrote long accounts of him to Mrs. Ingram and to Ruby, both had been so terribly anxious during the time of sickness. They had each volunteered to come, if Dulcie thought that their presence would be of use ; but Dulcie had preferred to nurse him herself when the time of danger and fear was over. Now Dulcie began to think that she need have no more fears, for the wound had quite healed, and Maurice became nearly himself again.

"What is the matter?" she said to him one morning.

"I have a headache ; that horrid brandy has given it to me," he said. "Bring me some more, Dulcie. I believe the proverb, 'a hair of the dog that bit you,' is a saying of your country ; but none the less true for that."

"Do you think it will do you good?" said she, pouring him out some.

"Try it, at all events," he said.

Then she left the room ; and when she returned an hour or so later, she inquired of him whether his headache were better.

"Don't ask questions ; leave me alone," he said.

Astonished, she made no remark, and busied herself about the room.

"Are you going out with me in the carriage?" she said by-and-by.

"Did I not tell you to leave me alone ? Go !"

"Maurice, what is the matter?" said she, coming up to him and laying her hand on his shoulder. "Why, you are shaking ; you must have some brandy ; where is it?—the bottle I left on the table?"

"Get some," he said.

The glass decanter stood empty on the table, and Dulcie looked in astonishment at it. There had been plenty in it in the morning. She said no more about it; she only added, "Will you come out with me in the carriage?"

"No."

They had some friends at dinner that evening, and Maurice was very silent and unlike himself. Dulcie thought him sulky; but later on, before the guests had left them, he changed, and was apparently in high boisterous spirits; and Dulcie was again astonished.

The next evening Maurice had some friends to play at billiards with him. It was exclusively a party of gentlemen, so that Dulcie was alone in the drawing-room; and once, crossing the hall, she overheard one of the servants call to the butler that more brandy was wanted in the billiard-room.

Dulcie waited in solitude in the drawing-room until the last of the guests had left, when Maurice strode into the room and looked round.

"You still here?" he said. "You should have been in bed ages ago."

"I was waiting to see whether you would want anything, Maurice."

"Then never wait again; I dislike it, and I hate being watched. Be off!"

His manner was wild and excited, and a terrible fear came over her. But what could she do? She felt helpless as when she had waited for the doctor after the accident. Now, the only thing she could think of was to get him quietly to bed without any more unprofitable talk.

Whilst he lay sleeping heavily, she turned things over in her mind. Maurice was not himself, and this was the second time that this thing had been before her eyes; and what could it mean that this should be already the second time? Common sense told her that it would not be the last time. What could she do? She would not let him lose himself so frightfully without a brave effort and many efforts. She thought of Father O'Brian.

Surely he, with his influence, could do something here. Then again she thought, "No, I will try what I can do. If he should succeed and bring Maurice round again, I should owe his restoration to Father O'Brian, and after that I could not fight in opposition to him, as I intend to do, now and always."

It was a difficult theme to study, and poor Dulcie, despite her sunny elastic nature, felt that grey leaden clouds had overshadowed her summer sky.

But it needed no word of Dulcie's to tell Father O'Brian what was happening at Hunstanleigh. Lately he had been almost constantly there, day after day, and there was an anxious, watchful look in his eyes. He saw Maurice alternately depressed and wildly excited, and he knew full well what it meant; and he saw that Dulcie knew equally well, and that she was watching and working to try and stay this creeping thing in its course; and he knew that her efforts would avail naught; that the tide had passed her power to stem.

And he went away back to his dwelling, and there he wrote a long letter to Mrs. Ingram in London, and in this letter he said: "That which we feared has come to pass. I cannot tell the poor girl. I think it will be better if you come, and come at once. You must tell her everything. It is, alas, too late to do anything else."

Dulcie knew, of course, nothing of this letter. She kept a sorrowful silence; but she watched Maurice's movements with a cat-like vigilance, day after day, in vain.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE MOTHER-IN-LAW.

SOME really cold and wet weather suddenly set in, as is so often the case in our changeable climate, and Mrs. Ingram, alone, travelling fast as the express could bring her, shivered as she leant back in her seat. She was changed since we last saw her. Her face had a grey and

livid look in it, and the uprightness of her bearing had altered. She held herself carelessly now as she sat ; she never moved ; her hands lay in her lap, and her eyes remained fixed on the cushion of the opposite seat, without noting what they saw.

The rain pattered dismally, slantingwise, on the windows, and the trees bent in the wind.

"Rain !" said the lonely woman to herself at length, looking up at the window ; and then her eyes fell again on vacancy.

"Rolingstoke ! Rolingstoke ! Rolingstoke !"

With a start, she rose and let down the window, and a porter came up and let her out on to the platform.

"Any luggage, ma'am ?"

"That small portmanteau ;" and she moved across the platform, whilst the porter muttered in an undertone to a brother porter—

"This is a rum move, I expect. Here's Mrs. Ingram come all alone, and nobody expecting of her. But mothers-in-law will be mothers-in-law, bless ye."

Mrs. Ingram went to the outer door of the station, and she was recognised by two or three.

"Good lor' !" said one man, "if here ain't Mrs. Ingram herself, and nobody a waiting for her, no carriage nor nothing. Can I get you anything, ma'am ?"

"I want a fly to take me to Hunstanleigh. Is there one there ?"

"No, ma'am. You see it's a terrible day, and they are not out ; but if you'll kindly wait a few moments, I'll have one round."

The few moments were long ones ; and as the time lengthened, Mrs. Ingram in her impatience walked up and down the chilly, drafty little station shivering with the cold. By-and-by she went to the door. Why were they so long bringing round that fly ? She wished that she had telegraphed to have the carriage waiting for her. This delay was simply maddening.

"The fly will be up in one moment, ma'am. Will you stand inside, it is raining so ?" said the porter ; and then Mrs. Ingram noticed that she had left the shelter of the

door, and was fairly standing in the rain, and getting most unpleasantly wet. But she felt so miserable and impatient, that this knowledge scarcely affected her, and she remained where she was till the ungraceful, lumbering old fly drove up to the door, and she and her portman-teau were deposited within it, and they drove off, leaving those connected with the railway standing staring, and wondering what had brought Mrs. Ingram so suddenly amongst them.

The old-fashioned fly drove up to the chief entrance, and Mrs. Ingram got out, and passed by the astonished butler, saying, "Are they at home, Martin?"

"In the morning-room, ma'am," and Mrs. Ingram walked on, turning to the left, in the direction of the morning-room.

She opened the door, and without a word of warning stood on the threshold.

Dulcie, the girl whom she had last seen the picture of health and happiness, was standing in the window with clasped hands, her brow was resting against the glass as she looked out into the drizzling rain. She turned, as the door opened abruptly, not the bright happy face of her son's wife as in Mrs. Ingram's remembrance, but a pale, weary, anxious face, and Mrs. Ingram's heart sank yet lower as she noted it.

Dulcie started, and quickly came forward to meet Mrs. Ingram.

"What brings you? How and when did you come?" were almost the first words that she said.

"How is Maurice?" answered Mrs. Ingram.

Without one word Dulcie pointed to the other side of the room where, stretched on a sofa on his face, lay Maurice, sleeping heavily.

"Maurice!" said his mother, standing beside him. "Maurice!"

But he took no notice of her words; evidently he did not even hear them. And Dulcie said—

"Do not wake him: let him sleep—it is better."

And then Mrs. Ingram and Dulcie looked into each

other's eyes with a long look, which told that they understood one another.

"Come upstairs and take your things off."

But Mrs. Ingram stood watching Maurice's slumber as if she were turned to stone, and a hopeless, hard, set look stole over her face.

"Come," said Dulcie, "you are all wet; do come and get dry and comfortable."

Then she suffered Dulcie to lead her away and to help her to take off her damp travelling things.

"Oh, how cold it is!" she said, and again she shivered.

"Suppose you go to bed instead of going down again," said Dulcie; "Maurice is not well, and it will be better for you to see him to-morrow."

"No, no; I cannot wait. I have come all this way, and in all this hurry, that I might see him, and this without delay. I will go down at once."

And in spite of all that Dulcie could say, and cold and miserable as she was, the poor woman returned to the morning-room where they had left Maurice.

"Don't go in! I cannot let you!" said Dulcie suddenly, and standing before Mrs. Ingram.

"Stand aside, child. I know about it better than you do."

And then they went in together.

Maurice was sitting up at the end of the sofa, and apparently crying violently.

"What is the matter?" said Mrs. Ingram astonished.

"It means that he has been drinking so much brandy that he does not know what he is doing," said Dulcie in a hard voice. And she passed on to the window, again to watch the drizzling rain.

"Maurice," said Mrs. Ingram, "you have not spoken to me yet."

"Don't want to see anybody; everything is everybody's fault," was Maurice's answer.

"Maurice, get up and speak properly," said his mother sternly.

But there was no answer ; and she repeated in a loud tone—

“ Do you not hear me ? ”

“ Don’t speak to him,” said Dulcie, impatiently. “ Why waste your time ? You see that he cannot answer you ; that he has ceased to be a human being. Don’t tear your heart out trying to reason with him.”

Then Mrs. Ingram sat down in a chair, and covering her face with her hands, began to cry bitterly. And Dulcie again looked out of the window, paying no attention to her or to Maurice, who had again fallen into a heavy sleep.

By-and-by Dulcie looked round. Mrs. Ingram was in the same position ; and touched by her utterly dejected attitude, Dulcie went over to her, and kneeling down by her and putting her arm round her, she said, “ Do not cry, dear ! I cried at first, but it did no good ; help me to think what to do.”

“ What is that ? ” said Mrs. Ingram, starting.

“ The dinner-bell—come and eat some dinner.”

“ No, no, I cannot eat ; I do not think I shall ever eat again.”

“ Come now, I cannot let you sit here like this—cold and ill and miserable—you are still shivering. I will have some dinner brought in to you. And think of the servants : we must keep up an appearance before them still, as if all were well.”

“ Do not send anything—I cannot eat,” she reiterated.

But Dulcie went in alone to dinner ; and saying that Mr. Ingram not being well, and Mrs. Ingram fatigued with her journey, she would prefer to have some dinner sent to her in the morning-room, that she might sit with him whilst she was eating.

So dinner was sent into the morning-room, and Dulcie sat alone at the usual table, going through the ceremony of dinner bravely.

When it was over, she returned to the morning-room. Maurice had not altered his position, and, apparently, neither had Mrs. Ingram.

Dulcie was angry. What was the use of her trying so

hard to keep up appearances if she was to be unaided in this manner?

"Why, you have eaten nothing after all; you have not even taken the hot wine and water which the house-keeper, Mrs. Morley, mixes so beautifully. This will never do. Now, let me see you drink this at once;" and Dulcie determinedly stood over her and saw her behest carried out.

She then succeeded in persuading Mrs. Ingram to go to bed. And indeed the poor woman, thoroughly chilled—feeling ill and miserable—saw that she could do no good, and that rest and quiet was what she greatly needed.

"Are you asleep?" said Dulcie, an hour or two later, coming into Mrs. Ingram's room.


"No, dear. It is Dulcie, is it not? Come and sit here; I want to talk to you. Is the door closed?"

Then Dulcie closed the door and got up on to the side of the high old-fashioned bed. The room was one of the largest and handsomest in the house; there was a very large bow, consisting of three great windows to the ground; there was the large old-fashioned bedstead, with velvet hangings; and at the foot of the bed a sofa to correspond; and before the sofa a table, on which glimmered a lamp, which gave but faint light in the lofty, gloomy room.

"Why, your hands are still cold," said Dulcie; "you should have had a fire in spite of the time of year; it really is cold enough for it."

"Never mind that. I want to tell you something, Dulcie; something which you should have known long ago. I see now that it was a mistake to keep it from you."

Then half obliterated memories came over Dulcie; occasional mention that had been made to her about a secret. Was it really coming now? and her eyes fixed themselves on Mrs. Ingram's face, over which the lamp-light threw such an unreal, strange look, and she said, "Tell me then, unless you think that it will disturb your night's rest; then wait until the morning."



But Dulcie knew as she said it that the morning was not the time for earnest, perhaps painful talk. It is easier to say one's say when shadowy lights and protecting darkness aid us with their shield ; and holding Dulcie's hand, Mrs. Ingram raised herself on her pillows, and with some difficulty said, " We might have known that it would never do for Maurice to marry. But what could we do but hope on, for he was our only son? However, he took the reins out of our hands, for he married you without letting us know of his intentions, and when we found that he had kept a certain secret from you, I judged it best to follow his wishes. His father thought differently ; and he was right. He said that, for your own safety and his, you should know everything. You have still no idea what it was?"

"None."

"You knew that he was exiled from home and friends ; and did you not think this strange, considering that he was but just recovering from a terrible illness. Surely you noticed the marks of illness, for he wore them strongly at that time. This illness," and she dropped her voice yet lower, "was delirium tremens."

With a strange sound, Dulcie threw up her arms in the air, and held them so for a few moments, and then they fell beside her ; and, with a leaden sound, Mrs. Ingram's following words seemed to fall on her brain.

"In his mad, reckless course he fell, heaven knows how, into the habit of drinking ; and under the influence of brandy he did frightful things. Once or twice he nearly killed himself ; once he threw himself downstairs, and once in the garden he fell from a tree, and his father found him lying on his face in the grass, covered with blood. This got worse and worse ; and he used to terrify us by the frightful things that he imagined were creeping about the room. We could not bear the idea of his being amongst strangers in this terrible state ; and yet it was almost impossible to have him at home. It was a very terrible attack of delirium tremens, and we thought that he would die. But he came through it, weak and exhausted ; and we were advised to send him to some

out-of-the-way place, where, amongst utter strangers and with very few temptations to indulge again, he might have the one chance left him of recovering and of freeing himself from the grip of this terrible enemy. He went to Arran, having registered a strong and earnest vow that no strong drink should ever pass his lips again. In Arran he met and married you."

"Oh, it was cruel!" spoke Dulcie.

"It was, for he should not have relied on himself."

"No, no; I mean it was cruel that I was not told. I could have guarded against this. Why, I have given him brandy day after day, and pressed him to take it after the accident—insisted on his taking it; and he asked me—oh, great heavens!—he asked me not to give it to him. You see what I have done!"

"My dear child, you could not help it."

"No," cried Dulcie; "but I should have been able to help it. Had you, none of you, common sense?—were you all mad?—did you wish to send him back to it and to drive me crazy?"

"I was not here; I did not know what was happening."

"But Father O'Brian was; he knew it."

"And he sent for me to come."

"When it was too late. What a work you have wrought amongst you!" she said bitterly.

"Ah, Dulcie, I only thought of Maurice! I believed firmly that he had got over this fatal habit; and that if you knew of what had been, you might turn against him, and that would drive him to it again. He was cured, and but for this fatal accident it might have been for ever a thing of the past. I was anxious when Father O'Brian wrote and told me that brandy had been prescribed for him, to help him to recover his strength. I knew that it would be the first time he had taken it since long ago, and I trembled as I wondered whether it would give him the taste for it again."

"Then it was that you should have told me. Surely some one amongst all those who knew it might have had that little bit of charity for me and for him," said Dulcie.

"I trusted so fully even then that his teaching had been severe enough, and that he was too certainly cured to return to that fatal course."

"And Father O'Brian sent for you, and you have come, but you are too late," said Dulcie slowly.

She was interrupted: a terrible fit of coughing seized Mrs. Ingram, who, holding her hand to her side, shivered again.

This went on for some little while, and Dulcie took no notice of it, but sat motionless, whilst a new hard look settled on her face.

It was some time before her thoughts returned to Mrs. Ingram, but then she saw that she was really ill, and she said simply, "You are ill; I will go and send for the doctor;" and she got down from the bed, and walked across the room, turning back at the door to wind up the lamp. She did all this mechanically, and then passed out of the room.

It was late, and she ordered one of the servants to set about saddling a horse, and go at once to fetch the doctor, as Mrs. Ingram was ill, that she had taken a severe chill. Then she ordered that every servant should go to bed, and that the man who went for the doctor should take the key of the door to let himself in again. She waited in the drawing-room until she thought it probable that they would all be in bed, and then she returned to the morning-room, in order to rouse up Maurice, and to get him, if possible, quietly to bed now that there were no servants about.

This was a painful and humiliating business, and her cheeks were burning and flushing painfully before she had accomplished her purpose; but a set determination had come into her every look and movement, and even Maurice fell into gradual obedience to her.

She returned to the drawing-room to listen for the coming of the doctor, and as she crossed the hall, the Scotch cook came to meet her, bearing a small tray.

"It is terrible cold," said the cook, following her, and drawing up a little table beside her chair, she placed her tray on it.

"What is this?" said Dulcie; "and I said that every one was to go to bed?"

"Ou aye, by-and-by. I kent when I heard that Mrs. Ingram was ill, that there wad be things to do, and I preferred sitting up to rising from my bed later, and ye'll jist tak these. See, they are our ain guid hodge-podge—noo!"

Dulcie smiled in spite of herself; the home-like accent and the look of the thick familiar hodge-podge was comforting; and whilst she was eating it, the tall, ungainly-looking woman stood by her, talking of the symptoms of Mrs. Ingram's illness, until sounds of the doctor's arrival were heard.

He shook his head over his patient, and said that in her exposure to cold and wet she had received a thorough chill, which, he privately told Dulcie, was likely to result in inflammation of the lungs.

And Dulcie and her Scotch cook, Janet McAlpine, had but little rest that night.

CHAPTER XLIII.

TEMPEST.

THE next morning Dr. Munday pronounced that Mrs. Ingram was suffering from pleurisy in its worst and most dangerous form; and Dulcie said to herself that when once a doctor's foot was in the house, it was long before he was out of it again. He had barely ceased from daily visits to Maurice.

Maurice woke up this morning in an extreme state of depression, contrition, and low spirits. He made such earnest promises for the future, coupled with such bitter regrets for the past, that Dulcie, in spite of herself, felt almost inclined to believe that the ruin he was bringing on himself might be checked even now.

And she went about her business of nursing Mrs. Ingram with something like hope to keep her up. She was employed in the sick-room for the chief part of the day,

and shortly before dinner she entered the drawing-room to see whether Maurice were there, as his mother wished to see him.

Maurice was sitting in a careless position on a low chair, with a packet of small books on his knee, which he was throwing one by one into the grate.

A sick feeling crept over her; after all the precautions which she had taken, and the only thing she said to herself was, "so soon!"

She could not take him to his mother, she could only get him into the morning-room, where, at least, he could do little mischief, and perchance he might sleep again on the large sofa. Not yet did the servants know what had come over their master, Dulcie hoped, and she would try and keep it from them a little longer.

Again, the next morning, there was a terrible awakening for Maurice, for he felt how strongly his old enemy was regaining its hold of him, and he knew from experience how weakly he could battle with it; but again he made fresh vows of strength to Dulcie, and although she tried to believe him, it was more than she could do.

"Maurice, Maurice! what is this terrible power which draws you on?" she said. "Can you not resist it? Think of me and baby; and, Maurice, think of yourself, of your own position—think and remember that it is to utter ruin that all this is leading. Rouse yourself to fight with this enemy! surely these thoughts alone will arm you to be strong. Will you go headlong to ruin? will you let yourself be beaten for the want of resolution and determination? Believe me, if you could but act with firmness, your effort would not be in vain."

"Dulcie, the thought of all this is none the less bitter to me than to you. What can I do? Tell me, what can I do to make reparation for this?" said he, in deepest, bitterest dejection and misery.

"Be strong, Maurice. How can you, a man with all a man's faculties, power of thought and intellect, degrade soul, heart, mind, and body? Instead of rejoicing that you are a man with every human power to take an important place in the world, you lose yourself, and thus

cast every blessing away! Oh, Maurice! what can it be to make you do this?"

"It will never happen again, Dulcie. Show me something that I may do to testify that I mean this, and regret what I have done."

"Only be strong," was the first thing that occurred to her to say. Then another thought came over her, and she bent over him and whispered, "If I were to ask a very great thing of you, would you give me my wish?"

"Anything in my power, Dulcie."

"Will you let me bring up my child in the Protestant faith?"

She felt that she had asked too much, and there was a moment's silence, and then he said, "As you please; Dulcie; bring him up as you please."

And her joy comforted him somewhat.

He went up with her to see his mother, who was very weak and ill; and having stayed some time with her, he ordered the carriage, and drove into Rolingstoke.

Mrs. Ingram continued to get worse from the very commencement of her illness, and gradually Dulcie gathered that there was but little hope. She sent for Mrs. Chesney, who spent one day, returning home the following; and this day, when Maurice had driven to Rolingstoke, Dulcie, by Dr. Munday's advice, wrote to Lady Lawrence and to Mrs. Selwyn, telling them that there were now small hopes of their mother's recovery, and that if they wished to see her they must come at once.

This was on a Wednesday, and the following day was one of those dates which Dulcie never forgot.

About eleven o'clock in the morning Mrs. Ingram died, and she had scarcely got over the first shock, and telegraphed to the daughters, when Dulcie heard a fly drive up to the door. She went towards the window, expecting to see one of her sisters-in-law, when, to her surprise and almost horror, she saw Harold Pierrepont getting out, and a portmanteau being carried in after him.

"He has come to stay, I suppose," thought Dulcie, as a remembrance of what had passed such a few weeks

ago, but which now seemed removed by ages, crossed her. "I will see him and tell him myself what has happened."

They had ushered him into the library, and before Dulcie went to him he had heard from the servant what had occurred, and he met her with grave words, and regretted that his coming had been so ill-timed.

"I will return at once," he said, "if you will provide me with a carriage; but I sent the fly away."

"We will manage that by-and-by; but you must have something to eat, and you must rest awhile. You can return to London if you like by the five o'clock train, that reaches London by eleven."

Maurice came into the room while Dulcie was speaking, and she started and grew red as she saw him. It was not that there was just then very much amiss with him, only there was a strange, half-stupid look about him; his hair was rough, and there was a certain bravado of tone about him. And Harold Pierrepont, as he shook hands with him, looked a second time, and somewhat curiously, at him. And Dulcie, in her painful sensitiveness on this point, watched the look and felt sick at heart.

"I say, Dulcie, give us some lunch; make haste; and—but, I say, no brandy, mind that;" and he laughed in a half-silly way, that made Dulcie's blood curdle, and Harold Pierrepont ceased speaking, and again looked at Maurice.

Dulcie left the room, and ordered the luncheon to be taken into the morning-room, and that only wine was to be taken in.

When Harold Pierrepont and Maurice went in to luncheon, Maurice said to the footman—

"Why is this? You have neglected to bring in the spirit-stand."

"Missis said as only wine was to be brought in," was the answer.

"Bring brandy, you thundering fool! Mr. Pierrepont has just come off a journey. Do you think wine will refresh him sufficiently?"

The man left the room, and they began their luncheon.

And, shortly afterwards, Mrs. Selwyn and Mrs. Chesney, Una and Alice, arrived, Lady Lawrence being, she sent word, too unwell to come. And Dulcie received them all. By-and-by she took them to see her who was lying in the great bedroom from whence she had never moved since the night of her arrival, when she had told Dulcie a terrible story; and Dulcie had kept her knowledge of this from Maurice.

"If he once thought that I knew this," she said to herself, "there would be nothing to hold him back."

They were all terribly grieved and sorrowful, and that afternoon was a most painful time; they all naturally asked for Maurice, and Dulcie said she would fetch him. She returned to the morning-room, where she had left him and Harold Pierrepont at luncheon.

Harold Pierrepont was lying back in an armchair, with his hands in his pockets, and he rose as Dulcie entered the room.

"Where is Maurice?" she said.

"Over there. I am thankful to say he has just fallen asleep."

"Maurice, come; they are all asking for you," she said.

Harold Pierrepont interposed. "Do not wake him; he is not fit to see any one; let him sleep."

Then Harold Pierrepont already knew the terrible secret! And a despair came over her, and she avoided meeting his eye. She stooped to move the sofa-pillow into a more comfortable position for Maurice; that slightly waking him, he kicked one leg, as if to resent any interference; then she said, "Oh, about the carriage to take you to the station, Mr. Pierrepont. I quite forgot it in the bustle; but I will order it at once."

"No, do not order it; I am going to stay here," he said.

"Going to stay here!"

"Yes; you need a man in the house."

Then she left the room, to tell his sisters "that Maurice was ill and unable to see them."

The next morning Maurice woke sulky and angry with

Dulcie, asking her why she had that fellow here to watch him.

"He is not watching you, Maurice ; but, oh ! do not disgrace us while he is here. Remember that your mother lies unburied, and that your sisters and Alice are in the house. Remember what is expected of you—think what duties you have to fulfil."

Whether from Dulcie's words or Harold Pierrepont's presence, it is impossible to say, but certainly for the next few days Maurice was kept in check. Harold Pierrepont was almost always at his side, and Dulcie's nerves were strung to the utmost pitch. Three days passed in an agony to her, for fear that Maurice should break down, and that his sisters should see him at his worst.

At length came the day of the burial, bringing the sons-in-law to attend Mrs. Ingram's funeral, all but Sir Pelham Lawrence, who had a great aversion to attending at these things, and he now, on the plea of illness, remained in London.

When the procession was ready to set out, they could not find Maurice, and anxiously Dulcie looked for him. She found him in the library, sitting at a table on which were newspapers, cigars, and brandy. Harold Pierrepont was standing by him, urging him to go to those who were waiting for him ; but Maurice had taken just sufficient brandy to make him obstinate, and he refused to leave the room.

"Maurice !" said Dulcie, in a determined voice, coming into the room, and pointing to the door, "go ; they are waiting."

There was a tone of command in her voice which made him rise from his seat immediately and say, "Oh, are they ? I will go then." And before he left the room he stretched out his hand for the decanter ; but she was watching his every movement, and gently she put the stopper in it, and moved it away from his hand, saying in a quiet voice—

"Not now, Maurice ; they are waiting for you."

And without a word he moved away, and left the room, followed by Harold Pierrepont.

"Keep near him—watch him this one day, for heaven's sake!" she whispered.

And Harold Pierrepont did not leave his side until he left the house to attend the funeral.

Dulcie was more thankful than she could tell; for, later in the day, the rest of the family left for their different homes, and Harold Pierrepont was the only guest in the house.

A day or two passed on, and there was a great improvement in Maurice, but he had taken a great dislike to Harold Pierrepont. He was angry with him even for his having saved him from himself. He knew that he owed thanks to him for his sisters having gone away in ignorance of the curse that had again fallen over him, for Mrs. Ingram had kept the contents of Father O'Brian's letter to herself.

And Dulcie, seeing this, told Harold Pierrepont that it would be better for him to leave them just now; that although Maurice had got over that dreadful attack, he was yet unreasonable and unlike himself, but that when he was quite recovered he must return to them.

So Harold Pierrepont left them, after having given Dulcie his promise that no word of the late events should, through him, transpire to them in Scotland. He also gave Dulcie his address in London, and exacted a promise from her that in case she should need him, she would send for him at once.

After Harold Pierrepont's departure, Maurice seemed to recover from his sulky, unreasonable temper, and became again quite himself. He repented bitterly for what had happened; and, still under the belief that she knew nothing of what had occurred long ago, he made every endeavour to make up for what had now passed by every means in his power, and even Father O'Brian thought that all was well.

"Maurice," said Dulcie one day, "do you remember what you promised about the baby?" She said this

timorously, as if yet afraid that there would be disappointment. But to her surprise he answered —

“I remember my promise, and agree to it, Dulcie.”

“Well then, if I may, I should like to have him christened again; he can be christened into the Church of England here; and I should like Mr. Selwyn to be his godfather.”

Alexander Selwyn, Maurice's brother-in-law, was a great favourite of Dulcie's; they had been great friends whenever they had met; and this would be a way, she thought, of smoothing things over with the rest of the family, for Alexander Selwyn was alike a favourite with each member of the family.

Maurice agreed with her plans, and Mr. Selwyn was invited to come to Hunstanleigh accordingly; and Maurice waited to tell Father O'Brian this news until he had the protection of Mr. Selwyn's presence, for he knew what a hard and difficult task lay before him.

And almost before Dulcie could believe that it could be accomplished, the business was gone through, and Alexander Selwyn appointed guardian to her baby, and the busy barrister travelled back to London, leaving Maurice to arrange things as best he could with Father O'Brian, he only saying that he would see that the child was not brought up to be a Catholic.

And whilst Dulcie rejoiced afresh over her baby, she pitied Maurice for what he would have to undergo from Father O'Brian, and filled the days with extra tenderness from her to try and make up for it.

Time passed on, July and August were over, and the disturbance that had taken place in the family over the arrangement had died away; now September came, bringing beautiful seasonable weather, and Dulcie once more felt assured that the terrible danger which had hung over them had departed, leaving only peace and happiness; and Father O'Brian, the only other person about Hunstanleigh who had known the truth, believed likewise that Maurice had been finally cured.

Maurice and Dulcie had decided that in October, when

autumn tints would be glorious, they would set off for Scotland to see Auntie Jean and Auntie Bell.

Ruby wrote to Dulcie that Mr. Pierrepont had been with them for some time now, but that in the middle of October he was going to return for a short time to London on business; and Ruby added that Norman Ruthven had gone to America; and that everybody was well, and longing to see her; and that she was painting a wonderful little picture, which was to be finished by Dulcie's arrival.

All this was pleasant; and now that Dulcie was going to see them all so soon, she found out how much she was building on it, and every day she formed fresh plans of all that they would do in Arran.

Two days before they were to start on their journey, Maurice caught a feverish cold, lost his appetite, and began to shiver.

"I am going down to Rolingstoke in the carriage," said Dulcie, "and I will call on Doctor Munday, and ask him what will be the best thing to do."

When she returned from her expedition she went at once to the morning-room, where she had left him stretched on the sofa. To her surprise, on turning the handle, she found that the door was locked. To her repeated movements with the handle there was no answer, and she called, "Maurice, are you here?"

"Can't come in! Go away!" was the answer in a strange abrupt voice. And greatly wondering, and somewhat anxious, she turned away.

He did not come at the sound of the dinner-bell, and she returned to the still locked door.

"Maurice," she said, "dinner is ready, do you not want any?"

"No."

"Maurice, why do you lock the door? Let me in."

"Get away!" was all the answer she received. So she dined alone, saying that Mr. Ingram had a bad cold, and did not care for any dinner.

Afterwards she returned to the morning-room, deter-

mined at any price to enter. To her surprise the door stood open and the room was empty. She ran upstairs to search for Maurice, where she found him, in bed and asleep, and on the table stood the spirit-stand, with one of the brandy-decanter empty.

It was impossible to deceive herself, and she stood motionless, whilst a chill of horror stole all over her. She stood for she knew not how long, and then slowly she left the room, and went to the nursery and looked into the little white bassinette. She touched a little dark fluffy head, saying that this was all she had now—this helpless little baby of nine months old. She felt more miserable and wretched than she had done even before in the worst time, for her hope had been high, and disappointment came bitterly. She pictured to herself what Maurice would be and what he would say on the morrow; how he would promise and entreat of her to believe him that it should never happen again. But she felt that now it would be impossible to deceive herself into believing his words; she felt that she was powerless as her own sleeping baby, and that she could only wait for what the morrow should bring.

But on the morrow a change had come over Maurice. He no longer made the promises and vows of amendment; he had lost all command over his temper; and before the day was out he was worse than Dulcie had ever before seen him. And the fortnight that followed was a time that Dulcie could never bear to look back to; it was a terrible time of suffering and humiliation. She was constantly in terror of him, and as much as possible she kept the baby out of his sight. He was frequently more mad than sane, and if in these fits he happened to see the baby he would avow a steadfast determination of either drowning him, or throwing him out of window, or cutting his throat. The extent of her anxiety was so great that constantly she had locked him inside his nursery, in terror as to what might happen; and one night, whilst the household slept, she carried the child to a distant room in the highest, furthest part of the house. It was an odd, strange little place, but it was "safe;"

and whilst he slept she sat by the bedside, thinking, not of the child, but of his father.

It was impossible, of course, to keep this state of things a secret from the household; and all the servants stood in terror of their master. The housekeeper took herself off altogether, saying that it was as much as her life was worth to remain under his roof any longer; even Father O'Brian advised her to have some one with her, that it really was not safe for her to be left alone with him when these terrible attacks came on.

But she tried her influence with him yet another week, and wrote to those in Scotland that the visit which she had put off for a time must at any rate be postponed till the next year.

They wondered at her courage and determination who watched her trying to govern the man that could not govern himself. But a day came when, in terror of her life, she sat down and wrote to Harold Pierpoint, in London, "Come at once!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE DARKEST HOUR.

"**BEGONE!** and if you come into the room that I am in again, I'll murder you there and then. Begone!"

It was late on a summer evening, and in the dusky light, the slouching figure of a man with dishevelled hair was sitting on a table, swinging his legs. There were glasses and bottles on the table, and as he spoke he brought his hand down heavily on it, and the glasses rang again.

Dulcie, thin and careworn, left the room, and closed the door behind her. In the hall a servant met her, saying, "Mr. Pierpoint, ma'am; he's in the drawing-room."

But half attending to these words, and scarcely knowing why she did so, she entered the drawing-room, and went forward to meet Harold Pierpoint. He came

eagerly forward, and was shocked at the change in her appearance, and at the absent, strange way in which she spoke to him.

"Ah, yes, I wrote to you," she said; "I wanted to ask your advice about Maurice. I do not know what I had better do. He is a great deal worse than when you saw him; they say that it is not safe for me to be with him. But I am used to it now, and should not care for myself, but I am so afraid for baby; Maurice hates him, and I believe sometimes that if he got hold of him he would murder him." Dulcie's appearance and manner told even more than her words, and Harold Pierrepont's blood boiled as he stood before her. "He has had delirium tremens before, and he is going surely on the road to having it again, and I do not know what I can do to stop it."

And they sat down and talked over the matter, till all at once a strange sort of yell was heard, and they paused. Harold Pierrepont started violently, but Dulcie only walked quietly and unfastened the door; and then he, following her to the hall, heard the screaming yell of "Dulcie!" echo through the house.

She returned to the room where she had left Maurice, and found him standing by the overturned table, and looking on the floor at the broken glass.

He turned as she entered the room, and a frown spread over his face as he observed Harold Pierrepont following her.

"What does he want? I won't have him in my house. I'll shoot him like a dog if he stays five minutes longer."

Dulcie understood, but she doubted whether Harold Pierrepont would understand his thick, blurred utterance.

"Mr. Pierrepont, help me to get him upstairs," she said; "I dare not leave him here." And although Maurice resisted for a time, even violently, they eventually got him to his room.

And as Harold Pierrepont went down again, he asked himself whether it were not his duty to write to Mr.

Ruthven, at Arran, to tell him of the trouble that had come over Dulcie, and how her life was sometimes in danger. To leave things to go on as they were was simply an impossibility ; and he thought within himself what should he do, and how could he best shield her.

Presently she entered the room, and in a dull sort of whisper she said—

“Have you had anything to eat, Mr. Pierrepont? You had better go to bed ; it is very late.”

“How is he now?”

“He has gone to bed, but he will not sleep. He seldom sleeps, but he is quiet. Go to bed, please.”

She said this so quietly and seriously that, without a word, he rose and bid her good night, and went to his room. She remained downstairs for about an hour, and then went up the stairs. She heard the sound of the baby’s crying as she went, and was just passing her room to go to the nursery, when the door burst open, and Maurice appearing, cried, “Let me get at him!”

“Go back and be quiet, Maurice!” she said, forcing him to return to the room. “Remember it is very late, and every one is in bed. What is the matter?” And she managed to get the door shut.

“That little brute! Don’t you hear him yelling there? Let me get hold of him!” he cried, grinding his teeth.

Every fresh sound seemed but to irritate and infuriate him the more, and every moment Dulcie became yet more alarmed. She once tried to leave the room, to go and quiet the baby ; but he swore that if she attempted to go he would throw her down the stairs.

She gradually made up her mind to a bold course of action. She watched her opportunity, when he was at some little distance from the door, and then she stealthily approached and took the key from the lock, and just as he turned back she rushed out, and, pulling the door to, hastily locked it on the outside ; and only just in time, for he was hammering on the door almost before the lock was turned. She paused for a moment to get breath, for her heart was beating painfully. Then she

entered the next room, and found the bell, and rang; and rang, and rang again; then she went to the door of Harold Pierrepont's room, and knocking loudly, she cried, "Mr. Pierrepont, wake! I want to speak to you."

He sprang up, and opening the door at once, peered out into the dark.

"Who is it? What is the matter?" he said.

"It is I—Dulcie. Dress, and come instantly."

She then turned to go to the nursery, when she saw an odd-shaped figure, bearing a candle, coming along the corridor.

"Maistress, what in this world's wrang?" It was Janet McAlpine, the Scotch cook, who had heard the bell ring.

"Oh, go and wake one of the men! I want the horses put to the carriage instantly. Do you hear? instantly!"

Janet McAlpine stood for a moment listening to the kicks and strange sounds coming from the room where Maurice was locked in, and Dulcie stamped her foot, crying, "Do you hear? go instantly!"

She then went into the nursery, and without waking the nurse, who had fallen asleep before the baby left off crying, Dulcie herself dressed him completely, and in his out-of-door things; and before she had finished, Harold Pierrepont entered—for she had left the door standing wide open—and the light from the room was the only light in the corridor.

"Dulcie, what is it?" he said.

"Mr. Pierrepont, Maurice seems to be almost mad; he keeps on raving he will murder the child, and I am terrified to know that they are under the same roof. I cannot sleep or rest. I know how good and kind you are, and I want you to take him to his aunt, Mrs. Chesney."

"Now?" he said.

"Yes. I have ordered the carriage," she said, simply.

The baby was now dressed, and she said, "Come

down," and as in a dream he followed her down the broad old staircase, she carrying the child and he bearing the lamp; everything looked so strange and odd in the dim light.

She went into the kitchen, and there things looked more natural, for the cook had a Scotch fashion of leaving a huge lump of coal smouldering at night, which in the morning only needed a crack of the poker to be a good fire. The gas was alight, the kettle was on, there was a tray of refreshments preparing, and the cook herself, even a stranger figure than usual, was busy at the table.

"Is the carriage coming?" cried Dulcie.

"Yes, ma'am, but he tell't me it wad be twenty meenits before he could dress himsel and hae the horses buckel't to. An' that's jist ten meenits yet."

So Harold Pierrepont and Dulcie partook of the coffee that she had prepared, Dulcie standing the while at the kitchen table, holding the now sleeping child. As soon as they had finished the strange repast, they went out at the back door, as Dulcie did not wish the carriage to drive up to the house. The cook walked first, bearing the lantern, for it was a dark night, Dulcie and the child and Harold Pierrepont following.

The carriage and horses stood ready, and Harold Pierrepont first got in, and then Dulcie handed to him the sleeping child, which was wrapped in a large shawl, and the coachman was told to drive fast to Mrs. Chesney's.

He had driven there before, although it was nearly twenty miles. And when the carriage lamps were lighted they drove off quickly, whilst Dulcie and Janet McAlpine stood watching the flickering lights disappearing amongst the black trees.

When the last flicker had vanished, and every sound had ceased, they turned and went back to the house, and Janet McAlpine entreated Dulcie not to return to the room in which she had locked Maurice; but Dulcie only said, "Why not? The baby is gone. I fear nothing now." And in spite of every persuasion and

entreaty, Dulcie turned the lock of the door and entered the room.

"Dulcie, Dulcie, save me!" were the first words that she heard as she went in. "Dulcie, save me! there is a five-legged monster crawling about the room," and Maurice clung to her, trembling in every limb.

"It is all your imagination; there is nothing there, Maurice. I will light some more candles if you like."

"There, there! Keep it off; it will tear me to pieces!" and he sprang on to the table, shrieking with sounds unhuman; and whilst Dulcie was fruitlessly trying to soothe him the door opened, and a tribe of scared trembling servants appeared on the threshold.

Maurice by this time was in a further corner of the room, and round him he had gathered a barricade of chairs; and every time that he fancied the terrible monster was approaching him he yelled afresh, whilst some of the terrified servants screamed in chorus.

Dulcie desired one of them to fetch Dr. Munday and the rest to leave the room; and whilst they obeyed her, Maurice whispered to her that the monster had crept into his hole. "Stop it up! pile things up before it!" he cried; and under his directions, hoping to quiet him thereby, Dulcie heaped up fender and chairs and foot-stool, and different things, and when he thought the pile sufficiently high he made her come and stand near him, whilst he whispered long descriptions of this monster which he said was haunting him. And this kept him quiet for some time, till all at once he gave a frightful yell, and with staring eyes he pointed to the heap of furniture which Dulcie had piled up. "Look! it is twisting itself out. Keep it in! kill it!" and his restless burning fingers clutched at the chairs which he had gathered round him.

And in the terrible scene which ensued whilst he was springing over tables, bed, and chairs, and climbing things which Dulcie would have thought impossible to climb, and crying out with terrible shrieks, Dr. Munday walked into the room.

No need to tell her what was the matter; no need to tell her what this hideous creeping monster meant. She

knew as well as any words of Dr. Munday's could tell her what it was that had overtaken Maurice.

And in the days which followed, when Dr. Munday had provided nurses to guard and watch over Maurice, when he himself was almost constantly in the house, they tried all that they could do to spare Dulcie ; but they could not make her understand that her presence did him no good, and was only wearing her out ; and there was no trying fatigue, no terrible sound or sight which she would allow herself to be spared, and she bore it all in silence, whilst her one cry to Dr. Munday and the other doctors was, "Can't you get him to sleep? Is there nothing that you can administer which will give him sleep and rest?"

There was nothing, no drug, no means of any kind which could bring sleep to his eyelids, and day and night alike his troubled bewildered brain was working madly and terribly ; not only one monster, but myriads of them, he declared, were pursuing and hovering about him, seeking opportunity to tear him limb from limb.

A week passed on ; seven days and seven nights ; weary terrible hours ; bringing no moment's rest, only fresh suffering and terror. Dulcie bore herself bravely, living almost without sleep, till the doctors and nurses wondered at her. Her only thought was how to get Maurice to sleep ; and in spite of hearing that her efforts must for a time be useless, she tried every simple plan that suggested itself to her ; but hours and days and nights went on, and sleep did not come.

She had forgotten everybody and everything that was unconnected with Maurice and his illness. She scarcely thought twice about the baby ; she was only dimly conscious that he was not in the house. With Maurice, it was impossible to think of anything but him ; and, away from him, she either slept or was too prostrate to know exactly what she was thinking of.

One evening, a Saturday evening, they persuaded her to leave him for a time, in order that she might get some sleep, for she was utterly worn out, and the doctors could only wonder how she had been able to go through

the ceaseless fatigue which she had borne. When they had got her outside the room in which Maurice was, she found that she was so weak that she could scarcely stand or walk.

They left her lying down in her room, having first closed all the blinds, for it was still light, and they hoped that she would sleep for a long time.

But she was too fatigued to sleep, though she lay just as they left her, movelessly and with her eyes closed. Strange sights and sounds seemed to be buzzing about her. Her thoughts were in such a whirl that she could not collect them, and for an hour or more she lay thus, half unconscious, when a restless desire came over her to return to Maurice and see how he was; perhaps he might be feeling sleepy.

And she rose and slowly went out of the room, returning to where she had left Maurice. She found him with one doctor in a large room on the same floor. "Dulcie, let me out!" he cried as she came in. "I cannot stay here. I shall be eaten up in three minutes, and nobody cares."

"I suppose he may go into another room?" inquired Dulcie of the doctor.

"Oh yes, but it will do no good; he has been changing the room all day."

"Take hold of my arm, Maurice, and come," she said in her low weak voice.

He clutched nervously at her arm, and with the doctor walking before them they passed out at the door, Maurice looking behind him in a terror-stricken manner, and walking with sudden nervous starts and tremblings.

Just as they were passing the great staircase, Maurice cried out, "It is coming close! it has got hold of me!" and with a hideous roar he wrenched himself from Dulcie and the doctor, and sprang madly into the air.

He fell, hanging half over the bannisters, and for a moment he clung there, the next he disappeared; and there was a dull and heavy sound on the black and white stones in the hall below.

Weak and worn out as Dulcie was, she was down-

stairs before the doctor, down the fine old staircase which she had always admired so much, and which she had so constantly said was the best part of the dull darksome great house.

She had but a confused notion of what was passing before the fireplace in the hall. She heard those who had gathered round saying, "He is dead!" She had an impression that it was all a dream, a strange nightmare, out of which she could never more wake. People were talking to her, and she was being carried upstairs again back to her room, and then there came some one about her with strong tender arms, and a low yet determined voice; and they brought something like comfort, for somehow the voice and the touch were familiar, and then all became a blank, and for Dulcie there was for a time nothing more.

CHAPTER XLV.

DESOLATION.

WHEN Dulcie awoke from her long unconsciousness, her eyes went up with a questioning wonder into the face that was bending over her, but she said nothing, and for an hour or two she watched the figures moving about the room.

The watchers noted this change in her, and that she was evidently trying to recall things which had happened, but her mind was weak and clouded, and the effort was almost beyond her. Think as she would, there was one figure whose presence she could not explain.

But there was a familiar home-like touch and look which gave comfort and rest. By-and-by this figure again bent over her, and this time Dulcie looked up in her face and said, "Auntie Jean!"

"My bairn!"

With a broken gasp, Miss Jean hid her face in the pillow beside Dulcie's face. Nothing which had yet happened had so thoroughly shaken her as had this one

moment. All through the weary months and months which had elapsed since she had last seen her, Miss Jean had been hungering and longing for a sight of her bairn—her bonnie Dulcie. It had been a great shock to her when first she had heard that during the time that she had pictured her well and happy, she had been suffering cruelly. This news of the real state of things had burst suddenly on her but a short time before, when Harold Pierrepont, weary and dusty with travelling night and day, had arrived at the House on the Hill at Arran, telling of terrible doings at Hunstanleigh, and saying that he had come to fetch Miss Jean, whose presence was absolutely necessary.

Miss Jean lost not a moment; she set out there and then, travelling for the third time in her life over the border. The first time had been to see her sister on board the India-bound ship; the second time had been to meet and fetch the two little orphan children, and on neither occasion had she remained longer than two days in England. This one was her third visit, and it was yet a more melancholy one than either of the others had been, for she arrived at Hunstanleigh immediately after the funeral of Maurice Ingram, which took place four days after his fatal accident.

Miss Jean blamed herself that her coming had been so late, for the large household was without a head. There was no one to take care of Dulcie—no authority over the servants—and she, better than any one could have done, now did both, with assistance from “the one wise-like body in the house,” as she called Janet McAlpine, the Scotch cook.

She found her bairn so altered that she would scarcely have recognised her. The fresh, sweet heather-bloom look was gone, and with it every characteristic of “Dulcie;” but when three weeks of changeless days had passed, she had grown accustomed to the new Dulcie—able to look at the thin white face and the dark-circled unconscious eyes without receiving a fresh shock. All this she could bear, looking forward hopefully to the

time when recollection should return and the eyes recognise her.

No one thing is as it stands in our imagination, even realisation and satisfaction are otherwise than we have dreamt them to be. When expression came back to Dulcie's eyes, it was hard to bear; when she looked up into Miss Jean's, it was pitiful; but to hear her voice, was worst of all. Her voice had always been peculiar; there was a rich, bright ring in it, which people remembered and strangers noticed; but when a thin grating sound said "Auntie Jean!" Miss Jean broke down, and turned her face to the wall.

Dulcie took no notice of this, but by-and-by she said again—

"Auntie Jean, when did you come?"

"Three weeks ago," spoke Miss Jean without looking round.

Dulcie slightly moved her head once or twice, and then she fell asleep.

It was a long slumber, and those who watched rejoiced, saying that she would wake refreshed.

Miss Jean sat beside her, scarce daring to move, thankful for the healing sleep, dreading the waking which would follow, yet longing for another of those looks of recognition—pitiful and heart-breaking though they were.

It came at length, but so silently and unexpectedly that Miss Jean started to perceive that the dark eyes were looking out straight before them, and at her.

"I am thirsty," she said; "give me some tea. Lift me a little higher. Put more pillows under my head."

Miss Jean hung tenderly over the forlorn little white shadow which she had raised on her pillows, but no change came over her face, no difference in its expression as she said—

"How long is it since Maurice—died?"

"More than three weeks."

"How long afterwards did they bury him?"

"Four days afterwards."

After this she said no more, but she eagerly drank the

tea which they brought to her ; and Doctor Munday, coming an hour later, found her again sleeping a peaceful and refreshing slumber.

"I was once or twice, even yesterday, alarmed about her," he said to Miss Jean. "It has been a terrible time for her, poor girl ; but I think now we are in a fair way to do well. You will have a long time of nursing and much anxiety before you, Miss McInnes ; but I believe you Scotch people are great at nursing."

"I think she will do well now," was Miss Jean's answer.

From this time a slow but steady improvement set in ; but although there was no danger, there was a great and lasting weakness and lethargy ; it seemed as if heart and strength were alike spent and gone, and that she only existed from day to day because the doctor and nurses were so indefatigable. But nothing was too much for Miss Jean ; fatigue was apparently unknown to her. She found a kindred spirit and an ally in Janet McAlpine ; and between these two, there certainly never was an invalid more carefully and tenderly nursed than was Dulcie.

Mrs. Chesney had several times been over to Hunstanleigh, but each time Dulcie had refused to see her. In vain Miss Jean tried to persuade her to see her, if only for a few minutes. She scarce even desired to see the child again. There was nothing to be done but to wait yet a little longer.

Miss Jean had heard from Janet McAlpine the history of the child's banishment, as well as many other particulars of Maurice's illness, and her heart ached and bled for Dulcie as she listened. But that page of her life was closed and ended ; the stricken soul lay bruised and wounded, needing all that loving hands and human tenderness could give her. No wonder that she was callous to all around her.

But this state of things continued, and might have continued much longer, had not Miss Jean made a decisive move.

It was one chilly, dismal December afternoon, and on

a sofa by the fire, supported by cushions, lay Dulcie, a thin, pale shadow of what she had been, when Miss Jean ushered Mrs. Chesney and the baby into the room; and the first real change passed over Dulcie's face as she received them.

"Oh, Laura! I do not think he knows me at all," she said after a few minutes.

"I think he does," was the answer; "but he is such a mere baby that you cannot expect much of him."

"Perhaps it is because I am so changed; but he will have to get to know me looking as I do now."

Miss Jean lifted the child and carried him away to the window, and Mrs. Chesney sat down by Dulcie. She was greatly shocked by her appearance, and by her weak, tuneless voice.

"You should not have shut me out for so long. I have wanted so much to see you."

"Thank you, dear, for taking care of baby," said Dulcie. "Mr. Pierrepont told you how it was I had to send him off to you at that hour of the night, I suppose?"

"He did. But why did you not let me know before then what was going on? I might have helped you. You ought not to have been alone. See what it has brought you to. I cannot tell you how I have reproached myself for it, for being of so little use to you; and how often you have helped and comforted me when I thought I was sorely tried. But you have also taught me what real suffering is. Dulcie, we all made a terrible mistake when we kept you ignorant of what happened long ago."

"I do not know," she answered; "this has been entirely owing to the accident at the stables. If I had known of what had happened before I might not any the more have been able to help this. Do not let any one blame themselves. How are Una and Alice?"

"They are well, but grieving terribly for you."

"Ah!" and then Dulcie paused before she added, "I think Auntie Jean wonders that I do not cry; but I wept long ago; long, long ago! My Maurice had ceased to be, long before he was dead to the world. Still, I wonder that I do not cry, for there seems to be nothing

else left to do. There was always so much to be done, and everything was so terribly earnest, that it took up all my life, and strength, and feeling. I know nothing now but a blank—a weary, endless desolation.”

“No wonder you are so weak, dear, but in time you will get stronger. Arthur is at home just now,” said Mrs. Chesney, hoping to attract Dulcie’s attention; and as she said this, Dulcie looked at her as if trying to be interested. “Yes, Arthur has been at home for the last month, and we really have been much happier together than we ever were before. He was so pleased with your baby—he never saw him before; and he took a great fancy to him, and was always playing with him. I think it was the baby that made us friends. I didn’t know that Arthur cared for children.”

“Is he still at home?” said Dulcie.

“Oh, yes!”

“Then I must not keep you here; you must go back to him.”

“But I must nurse you; I cannot leave you now.”

“Oh, yes, you can. Arthur has nobody but you, and I have Auntie Jean.”

Mrs. Chesney was evidently divided; her affection for Dulcie was battling with a new-born desire to be at home with her husband; and in the end she gave way to Dulcie’s wish that she should return home the next morning early.

Maurice had been dead nearly five weeks before Dulcie left her bed, to be wheeled in an armchair to the window of her room.

She was stronger and better, but was still averse to doing anything, or being moved into another room; and as day after day passed on, and she walked about the room, Miss Jean and Dr. Munday did their utmost to persuade her to go into another, or even to go downstairs. But she only shook her head and said, “Not yet.” And when she was alone with Miss Jean she would say, “Auntie, I do not think I shall ever be strong enough to go down the staircase.”

“What shall we do with her?” said Doctor Munday

one day to Miss Jean. "She will never get well stopping in that one room; she should have change of air and scene; her husband has been dead nearly six weeks now; it is time that she braced herself up to go downstairs; the longer she puts it off the worse it will be."

"Well, we must just bide a wee," said Miss Jean; "we cannot hurry her; just leave nature alone. I know her well enough to say that when she feels that she can, she will fulfil her duties."

Miss Jean did not tell Doctor Munday of her own desire to get Dulcie away from the dead-alive atmosphere of Hunstanleigh; but after his departure she first broached the subject to her, suggesting that she should go "home" as soon as she felt strong enough to take the journey; and after a short time Dulcie caught at the idea. She had the greatest horror of going down the staircase, and of living in the great dull rooms, which would now be more terrible than ever.

"Auntie," she said, "couldn't Hunstanleigh be let, for some years, at any rate? It would be so bad for the house to be shut up, and I could not possibly live in it. I will write to Alexander Selwyn about it."

By Maurice's will everything had been left to Dulcie until little Maurice came of age, and after that she would still have a large income. But now she only felt that it was impossible for her to live at Hunstanleigh.

Mr. Selwyn easily understood her horror of the scene of Maurice's illness and of the fatal catastrophe which had so suddenly put an end to his life—a young life, which might have been the opening to a bright and brilliant career. But his life had been a wasted struggle, a memento of power thrown away; for there were the talents with which nature had endowed him, in the germ as they were given, uncultivated and let to rust; and the world had given him friends and fortune, and yet with all this his life had been a failure, and this even from the beginning. It seemed that with every good impulse, thought, talent, and power, there had come a counter spirit of evil to mar them all. Weak and unstable by nature, frail of purpose, he had been but a poor, con-

temptible bit of humanity, standing helpless as the waters of temptation passed over his feet, content to let them rise and gather into torrents, flooding higher and yet higher about him, and without even one cry for help he had let the waters close above his head. And in spite of the pain and suffering that this had brought, Alexander Selwyn said to himself, that it was better that his life should have ceased, than that he should have lived to bring the years of sorrow and weary long-suffering that would assuredly have come to his wife, and to those who cared for him.

Hunstanleigh was to be let for five years. And Dulcie let Auntie Jean plan all the arrangements for taking her away. Miss Jean tried to rouse her interest by speaking of the meeting with Ruby, and all other friends. But she would answer as if she had no heart in anything, and Miss Jean came to understand that time was the only thing which could perhaps give Dulcie back to herself.

Miss Jean had taken the greatest aversion to baby's nurse, whom she called a useless, fine lady, and a few days before the departure from Hunstanleigh, she astonished Dulcie by saying that she had been making some arrangements with Janet McAlpine, and the consequence was that the cook was to be entrusted with the dignity of nurse to the baby, an arrangement which gave satisfaction to the three chiefly interested therein. At first Dulcie could not get over her astonishment, and while Miss Jean was explaining how matters had come about, a servant entered the room, saying that Father O'Brian was downstairs, and would like to see Mrs. Ingram.

"Whose father did you say?" inquired Miss Jean.

"Oh, it is Father O'Brian, the priest," said Dulcie.

"Guidsake, pit him oot!" said Miss Jean, in her excitement dropping into broad Scotch.

"Please tell him that I am much obliged to him for calling, but I cannot see him yet," said Dulcie.

Miss Jean stood silent for a moment after the servant had left the room, and then she followed as far as the stairs, and over the bannisters she peered down into the

hall beneath, to see that there was no mistake about Father O'Brian's exit.

By-and-by there were sounds below, and she looked curiously at the black figure that was crossing the hall, with the slow noiseless step. "Just the devil incarnate!" she said to herself; "there's poison in his very walk. If he thinks any of us are wanting a through ticket from him he is making a great mistake." And then the hall-door closed. "Shut for a long day, my gentleman—father, or whatever you call yourself—as far as you are concerned, I'm thinking," and slowly she returned to Dulcie.

A short time later a servant came upstairs, saying that Mr. Merton Crawshaw was in the drawing-room, and would be so much obliged if Miss McInnes would speak with him for a few minutes.

"Is it a mister?" inquired Miss Jean.

"I suppose so," said Dulcie. "What do you mean?"

"I was wishing to know whether it was a 'father,' that is what I mean."

And Dulcie gave a small kind of smile as Miss Jean went out of the room.

Miss Jean had no idea what description of a mister she was destined to find in the drawing-room, and she looked curiously before her as she entered. She saw standing before the looking-glass an enormously rough large overcoat, with extremities of thin legs, and a narrow, flaxen head. The door was at some distance from this particular looking-glass, and the figure in the distance evidently heard nothing as Miss Jean crossed the thick soft carpet, approaching him.

He was gazing at the reflection sent forth from the glass, silently, and turning his head gently from one side to the other.

Miss Jean instantly became aware of the absurdity of the situation, and it was impossible for her to help standing silently for a moment to enjoy it—she watched him, and he watched the looking-glass.

It was a strange, unpicturesque outline, and Miss Jean said to herself that she had "never set eyes on the like

of him" before. His patience, too, threatened to outlive hers, and at length she said, "I hope I do not disturb you, sir; but you must remember that I have only an object to look at, whilst you have a reflection, which is perhaps a pleasing one."

Merton Crawshaw started, and coloured violently, and commenced several sentences, terminating with a bow, and the words,—“Miss McInnes, I presume, I have the pleasure of speaking to?”

“I am Miss McInnes. I heard that you wished to see me.”

“I did, indeed. Mrs. Ingram’s aunt, I believe; and Miss Duncan’s aunt also, I may conclude.”

“I am. You seem to be cold. Will you not come and warm yourself by the fire?” and Miss Jean led the way to the big fire, which was doing its best to enliven the room.

And Merton Crawshaw, after putting his hat in several different places, ended by putting it on the floor, and sat down on a chair beside it.

“How is Mrs. Ingram?” he inquired.

“Thank you, she is a little better; but she is still very weak and ill.”

“Ah, to be sure! Terrible thing! I assure you we were all no end shocked—quite upset, you know, and that kind of thing. I do not know whether you are aware that I was at the blasting up of the rocks and saw the accident? Really you cannot conceive how upset my nerves were, really. I—I——”

Miss Jean waited, but no end came to the sentence, and then she added, “Did you wish me to give any message to Mrs. Ingram?”

“Oh no, no—at least, my sister and all of us are so anxious to hear how she is. I don’t know why I so particularly wished to see you, but I did. You said that Miss Duncan was none the worse for her journey, I think?”

“Her journey?—oh, that was a very long time ago. No, she has never been ill in her life.”

“Ah, to be sure! Very sweet girl, very.”

Miss Jean looked somewhat curiously at the flaxen eyelashes, which were directed to a pair of shining boots, and then Merton Crawshaw said—

“I think you said that Miss Duncan did not send any message to me?”

“Ruby send a message to you!—not that I ever heard of.”

And Merton Crawshaw, somewhat alarmed at Miss Jean's singular manner, rose nervously from his chair, and lifted his hat from the ground and placed it on a neighbouring chair.

“Will you take a glass of wine?” said Miss Jean, thinking that he was going away, and her Scotch hospitality demanded that there should be refreshment of some kind offered.

“Thank you, no. I assure you I haven't one moment to stay, I really have not. So Mrs. Ingram is better; and have you seen Miss Duncan lately? Do you often see her?”

“Often enough,” said Miss Jean; “she lives with me.”

“Now, you don't say so, really? How very pleasant! All amongst the wilds of Scotland, I believe? It must be a most amusing place to visit. Now, do you not think it would be a good place to make a tour in? But I suppose one would have to rough it, and that sort of thing?”

“Exactly,” said Miss Jean. “You would find it different from anything you had seen before, I should think.”

“Ah! but that is so pleasant—new sensation, you know, and that sort of thing. Oh, I assure you, Miss—eh, Miss—when I travel I throw myself quite into the manners and customs of the country, whatever they happen to be; and in Arran I should do precisely as the Arranites do. I am sure it is the way to get at the— the hearts, you know, of the people.”

“You would have to wear their dress too,” said Miss Jean; “so you had better make your tour in summer, or you might find the kilts cold,” and she gave an im-

perceptible glance at the extremities of the great overcoat.

"Kilts! ah, to be sure! Of course I should go in for kilts; to be sure! That will be something to do. I shall write at once to Glasgow to the best house there. Perhaps you, or perhaps if you are busy, Miss Duncan would be good enough to furnish me with an address for the purpose, and I would write for patterns of plaids. Such a thing as that of course requires a great deal of judgment in choosing. By-the-by, I believe there are wild bulls and things inhabiting the glens about, so green plaids would be preferable to red ones."

"And you should have a philabeg," suggested Miss Jean.

"A—? I beg your pardon." And Merton Crawshaw was proceeding to sit down, when Miss Jean started up, and catching hold of the arm of the rough coat, pulled him suddenly on one side.

"D'ye no see what you're doing, man? Just think what you will look like when you've that on your heid after you have sat on it."

He turned and gazed on his hat, which was on the chair he proposed sitting on, and he earnestly thanked Miss Jean, and then added that he must be off; and as she did not offer to detain him, he was shown out very shortly afterwards.

When he was once more in his trap, he said to himself, "Rather odd old party, but intends to be well-meaning. Let's see; what was it—philabeg, or something? Now, what in the dickens is that? I will look out that word in the dictionary when I get home. Wish I knew how it was spelt though!"

Miss Jean walked up the stairs, saying to herself, "Well, if this is an Englishman, give *me* a Scotchman!"

Eagerly Miss Jean made all arrangements for leaving Hunstanleigh. She was more impatient than she could tell to get on the other side of the border, to be again up amongst her "ain folk," and to be away from Southerners whom she could not understand. Their very language *was* uncomfortable, and many a time she had said, with

her strong northern accent, "Don't be talking you wonderful English; talk plainer;" whilst the English people found it difficult enough to understand her.

It was in the month of January that they left Hunstar leigh. Dulcie, slight and thin, in her deep black, came out of her room for the first time for nearly two months and holding Miss Jean's arm, she passed silently and slowly down the broad old staircase, with Janet McAlpin following, carrying the baby wrapped in a large white fu cloak.

They travelled easily and slowly, and two days afterwards they arrived at home. Miss Bell, Ruby, and Mr. Ruthven were on the quay waiting their arrival, and trusting that there would be no disappointment, and they drove up to the house in the somewhat grey light of the winter afternoon, Dulcie scarcely believing that she was really at home again.

Donald Ruthven went up to the house with them, and during the evening when they were all sitting round the fire in the parlour, he bent sorrowfully over Dulcie, and looking from her to Ruby, he said, "They are no on bit alike now."

CHAPTER XLVI.

WELL WON.

MISS BELL never rested until she had made a full confession to Dulcie of what had been weighing for so long on her mind. She told her how she had known of Maurice's failings long before Dulcie had married him and that it was all through her weakness and indecision that these troubles had come over her.

"Jean aye tell't me that my indecision would be the ruin of us all, and see how right she was."

"Never mind, Auntie," said Dulcie, "if you had told me I am sure I should have married him all the same. Do not worry yourself any more."

"Not worry, lassie! How can I no do that, seein

that it is I who have spoilt your life, just ruined your every chance of happiness?"

"Auntie, don't say that. Do you think that I would undo the past even if I could? Why, I had one year of perfect happiness, one blessed year; and even if I had to suffer for years as I have suffered during the past six months, that would not be too much to pay for that one year."

And Miss Bell wondered, but was silenced.

Christmas passed this year without Norman Ruthven, who was then in America. And the little party who had so missed Dulcie from amongst them now devoted their every thought and care to bring back her strength, that they might see the old merry look in her eyes, and hear the ringing sound in her voice.

Time passed on; spring gave way to summer, and the autumn following still found Dulcie and the baby at the house on the hill.

Donald Ruthven, Harold Pierrepont, Miss Bell, Ruby, and even Miss Jean, were all slaves to them, the baby being chief power in the community—for Dulcie ruled the rest, and the baby ruled her.

Janet McAlpine and Barbara shared their labours in some mysterious fashion best known and understood by themselves, but the chief thing was that the results were very satisfactory, and they were the best of friends. Their only point of dispute was the Gaelic language, for they both spoke it differently, as they had learnt it in different parts of Scotland, and naturally enough each one held to her own as the correct mode of speech, so that they had come to the conclusion that it would be best not to speak anything but English.

It was again autumn amongst the hills, and the purple heather had faded to the browns and reds which the moorland wears when the summer goes and the gloaming is short, and we find ourselves once more in the Fairies' Glen on the old road.

Away over the moorland rose the fierce rugged peaks, now warmed with glowing sunset tints, amongst the *bracken* ferns just turning golden, stood a graceful young

figure watching the glow on the hills. Suddenly she turned round, and a clear ringing voice cried, "Come up here out of the hollow, all of you. Come before the light leaves the hills. Make haste, lazy things!"

And Dulcie's black dress waved in the wind as she stood on the high bit of ground, waiting for the rest to come. Time has done its work, and youth and vitality have asserted themselves with their own vigour. That which Auntie Jean and the rest worked for and hoped to see is there; eyes, smile, and colour are all bright and glad; but with the returning health and strength have come a change; and although Ruby and Dulcie have grown again alike, there has come some alteration in every line and expression of her face. In the home circle this was scarcely noted, they only saw that she was each day getting "more like herself."

A slow procession came out of the hollow amongst the birch-trees; the two first were Harold Pierrepont and Miss Bell, and behind them appeared Ruby and Donald Ruthven leading a tiny child, and they are so entirely taken up by watching his steps, and holding each a grasping baby hand, that they pay no heed to the sunset-tints on the mountain-peaks. This is Dulcie's little Maurice, whose baby feet are learning their own use on the heather hills. And Dulcie laughs at the reverent way they regard those absurd steps.

"I think you had better carry him," she said, "it will soon be time that he was home."

An attempt to carry out her wish ensued, but the small object of every one's attention showed his difference of opinion by such a series of frantic kicks and yells, that there was a chorus of "Poor wee thing! he wants to walk!" And, as if this were an answer for everything, he was again placed on the ground and allowed to continue his triumphal march along the old sandy road.

He was a bonnie boy, and it would have been hard to say who was most proud of him. Presently, as Dulcie watched him waddling along between Uncle Donald and Ruby, she said—

"How his other aunts would like to see him—Laura

and the others. I really think that they ought to see him, they would scarcely know him again. And Alice, too! Ruby, do you think Auntie Jean would let us invite Alice to come and stay with us? We could manage to make room for her."

Ruby was somewhat doubtful; still, as they walked home they discussed the matter; and it was agreed to ask Auntie Jean that evening.

And the next day's post took a letter to Alice Young, inviting her to come and stay for a time with Dulcie in Arran.

Alice was delighted to come; and early in October she made her appearance, astonished at everything and admiring everything—from the granite peaks to the baby.

Daily they walked and drove, and took Alice to see all the wonders and beauties of the island, showing off every point of scenery with the greatest pride, and delighted at her genuine admiration and enjoyment.

When she had been with them rather more than a fortnight, an invitation came to Dulcie from Mrs. Chesney, who, with her husband, was staying in London. They had purchased a yacht, and were preparing to start immediately for the Mediterranean; and as they were to be away for some time on the proposed trip, she was very anxious to see Dulcie again before they started. All the other sisters were in London, and it would be an opportunity of seeing them all.

Dulcie hesitated for some little time; but when Alice promised to remain where she was and to stay some little time after Dulcie's return from London, she settled to go. And after writing to this effect to Mrs. Chesney, she started on her journey, taking the baby and Janet McAlpine with her.

They had wanted her to leave him behind her, but she told them that they would not care to see her without him. So all that they could do was to see them off by the boat, and then return home to feel what a blank was everything without them.

They made themselves merry, however, and continued

their scrambles on the hills, and their sketching expeditions with Harold Pierrepont ; and Alice thoroughly enjoyed herself.

About a fortnight after Dulcie's departure Norman Ruthven came home from Glasgow for a week's holiday.

The two years and three quarters had made a great change in him, and whether it was his journey to the United States, or his having been made junior partner in the Glasgow firm, or what it was, was impossible to say, but he had now entirely lost the boyish expression and the somewhat shy manner with which strangers were wont to inspire him ; and he was now a fine-looking, handsome man, strong, upright, and well made, with a great fair, sweeping moustache, and honest straightforward eyes.

Miss Jean and Donald Ruthven were prouder than ever of him ; but he had taken to saying that they had lost all interest in him, and that he was entirely superseded by the baby.

In Arran, the only apparent result of his junior partnership was that he managed to get more holidays to spend in the "golden isle," as the folks living on the opposite side of the water call Arran, from seeing the sun go down behind the peaks, leaving a golden mist and purple lights hovering on the land.

Norman Ruthven was addicted to taking colds, which he called "severe," and he had found out that the only certain way of throwing them off, was by spending some days in Arran.

He would be joked about his fondness for the "golden isle" in the office, but the shafts of satire would fall harmless to the ground, for he made no secret of the fact, and laughingly acknowledged that besides the granite peaks which drew and broke the golden bars of sunset, there was yet another loadstone which took him to the island—a loadstone with hazel eyes and hair, living under the shadow of the golden hills.

His frank light-hearted manner, which won all alike, pleased Alice Young greatly, and the scrambles in the

hills were decidedly merrier, and the fun and enjoyment greater than before.

And Norman resolved that whilst he was there he might as well stay another week instead of coming again soon. So that when Dulcie returned from London, after a three weeks' absence, Norman Ruthven had still a week of his visit to run.

She had a great deal to tell them of her visit. She had been on board the Chesneys' yacht, and had seen them off, well, and happy in one another's society. She had stayed with Lady Lawrence and with Mrs. Selwyn, and they had both been exceedingly kind to her, and had admired the baby to her heart's content. And Una and she had been very friendly; and Una was to come to Arran and stay with her in the spring. Altogether, she had evidently enjoyed herself very much.

Hunstanleigh had just been let, too, for a period of five years; for although Maurice had been dead a year, she felt still that it would be utterly impossible for her to live there, for some years at any rate, and she was glad to feel that Hunstanleigh was off her mind, and to be well cared for, for the next five years.

Much as she had enjoyed her journey, she was delighted to get home; for she was such an inborn Scotch-woman, with such a love of country at heart, that she always felt safest and happiest close under the mountains.

Breezes, alternately from over the sea and across the mountains, had brought a pretty glow of health and strength to Alice's cheeks. She had never much colour, and Dulcie had never before seen her look so blooming and pretty as when she returned from her London visit.

At Hunstanleigh Alice's manners had been most quiet and somewhat distant even to intimate friends, and Dulcie was surprised to hear the laughing chatter and continual nonsense between her and Ruby and Norman Ruthven, and to watch her springing over the rocks of the burns, throwing aside her former slow stately movements.

"Ruby, what friends Alice and Norman are," said

Dulcie one day, "I never saw her take to any one so much before."

"Are they?" was the answer.

"Do you remember long ago, he used to like you, only you did not care for him? Do you remember?"

"Ah, that was long ago!—we have both forgotten all about that now," and Ruby looked along the road before them where Alice and Norman were walking and talking.

In the earlier part of their walk Ruby had disdainfully refused Norman's assistance, and Alice had accepted it, and he continued walking by her side. And as Ruby now watched them, she felt somewhat piqued, though she scarcely knew why.

At the next turn they came to, Norman did not even offer to help her, but continued his conversation with Alice, and she somehow felt still more piqued.

Ruby and Dulcie amused themselves with watching the two before them. When they came to the bridge near home there was evidently some feigned dispute between them and they walked on opposite sides of the road; and then with a laugh they joined one another again, and he offered her his arm up the hill, and she took it.

"How very odd it would be if they took a fancy to one another!" remarked Dulcie.

"Very odd!" was the short answer.

And Dulcie keenly watched Ruby's face, and ended her scrutiny by smiling to herself.

That evening Dulcie and Norman had a small private conversation. They had been playing "fortune" at cards; and luck had ordained during the game that Norman was to marry before the year was out; and it being then not far from the close of the year, it had been remarked that he had not much time to lose.

"Norman," said Dulcie, "when are the card fates to come true? they always destine you to a speedy marriage. Do you not remember in old times, when we played at 'old maid,' how angry you used to be if you were 'old maid'?"

"Because I never intended to be an 'old maid,' and I don't intend it now."

"Well?"

"Well, some things take time."

"Ah! but you know that there is no luck about the 'wooing that takes long a-doing?'"

"But it is not my fault. I would be married in half an hour if I could."

"Norman, you upset my nerves. Half an hour! Then you must have already settled on the young lady, I suppose?"

"I say, Dulcie, don't be a fool—I mean don't bother a fellow. You must know all about it. You know I want Ruby, and I have always wanted her, and I mean to get her in the end."

"In the end! Well, I hope you will get her before the end of your lives."

"Well, I asked her, and she would not have me."

"How long ago?"

"Three years ago."

"Three years ago! I should think that was long enough for her to change her mind. If you had said three days ago, there would be some sense in it."

"I say, do you think it would be any good my asking?"

"Faint heart, &c.," said Dulcie; adding, "Norman, do you like Alice Young?"

"Like Alice Young!—yes, jolly girl!"

"Is there any remote chance of your falling in love with her?"

"In love with her!—what are ye thinking of, Dulcie? Did I not tell you that I have been in love with Ruby ever since—always?"

"Yes, but that doesn't prevent the possibility of your falling in love with anybody else—men have a wonderful capacity for falling in and out of love with most of the pretty girls they come across."

"You may depend upon my not falling in love with anybody else."

"Very well then, I am glad to hear it. I would rather

that Ruby married you than any one. And to bring this about, I will give you a piece of advice ;—will you follow it ?”

“If it is to bring me Ruby, I think you needn’t ask, Dulcie,” and he caught hold of her hand.

“To-day, and once or twice before, you bestowed most of your attention and conversation on Alice Young ; do this for two days more, and on the third day ask Ruby again if she will have you.”

Norman was silent for some time, while Dulcie said to herself, “The slowness of man’s intellect ! the time that it takes his little mind to grasp a new idea !”

And then in Norman’s own eager, impetuous way, he suddenly cried, “Do you mean to say that she was jealous ?”

“I suppose you wish the whole room to hear what you are saying. If you do not control your voice in a more decent manner, Norman, I will have nothing more to do with you.”

“All right ! go on ! tell me what to do ;” this in a more modulated tone.

“Really men are the most helpless creatures—not worth their salt ! In all save brute strength, they cannot hold a candle to women. Do you want me to tell you how to pay attention to a pretty girl ? Perhaps you would like to be taught to speak as they teach the idiots in Earlswood asylum ?”

“Ah, Dulcie ! I know of old, when you once begin in that tone, there’s no getting any sense from you.”

“Speak for yourself,” was the answer. “I think I have tried to instil a small degree of common sense into you ; if you fail now, I say it will be your own fault. One more bit of advice, and I have done : don’t carry it too far.”

They were interrupted, and the conversation came to an end.

The next day, however, Dulcie’s advice to Norman was carried out to the letter ; and notwithstanding clumsy masculine fingers, the game was skilfully played—so skilfully, that before the end of the day the pretty hazel

eyes began to look wistful when they thought themselves unobserved, and Ruby retired to rest with an impression that things were unpleasant, and that "men were all alike." At one time she said to herself, "She really had thought that Norman cared for her, but now—ah, men were all alike! 'to one thing constant never.'"

And the hazel eyes woke up the next morning with the troubled look settled there; every one to her mind was doing their best to vex her this morning; and she ended by venting her displeasure on Auntie Bell—a habit shared by everybody else.

In the afternoon of this second day they were out sketching some rocks beside a burn, and Ruby, who was apart from the rest, suddenly slipped, and out of her hands fell her colour-box, which went clattering over the rocks into a little pool, one or two of the colours falling out as it went.

She picked herself up, and then knelt down beside the burn, and tucking up her sleeve, she dived into the clear water for the box.

"Hullo, Ruby! what is wrong? I say; let me help you!"

Ruby was feeling rather forlorn, and had been looking at a scratch which her hand had received in her fall, and wondering why nobody was near her to help her or to look after her. Norman and the rest she could hear, too, laughing, higher up the burn. So, without looking up or feeling thankful for his tardy appearance, she said, "Do not trouble yourself."

"Trouble, Ruby!—*trouble!*"

And as she neither answered nor looked up, but continued her fishing for the paint-box, he knelt down beside her, and as she drew her hand and arm, all wet and dripping, out of the burn, holding the drowned box, he took it from her, then using his handkerchief, he dried the white hand and arm; and although at first she rebelled, she ended by giving way, and remained motionless, whilst he added—

"Fancy calling anything I could do for you trouble *you* wouldn't have said that long ago, Ruby!"

"Long ago was different."

"Oh, was it!—Hullo! what is the matter?" and Norman became sure that there was something like a tear in each of the hazel eyes, and there was a moment's silence between them, still kneeling beside the rushing burn; then, after one or two sweet but broken words, he had her in his arms, and the two big tears that dropped from the hazel eyes had washed away all scales of misunderstanding from two pairs of eyes.

It was only the second day, and he had been bidden to say nothing until the third day, but chance and fate had willed it otherwise. Dulcie's advice had proved golden, and jealousy had done its work quicker and yet surer than she had guessed it would; but Norman was ungrateful, as is the fashion of this world,—and who can wonder at this?—there was no room for gratitude or aught else but Ruby just now: he was conscious of little else but the one great fact that he had won her.

His life had prospered with him; the world's gifts, which he had seen beyond him, had come within his grasp; and he now held a firm hold of the golden ladder; his feet were well planted on it, and he was travelling boldly and surely up its prosperous steps. So that one of his desires was being fulfilled; the other desire, the one which lay close and near to his heart, was this girl with the quiet, loving eyes. And he could not tell when it was that he had first loved her; he only knew that his life would be nothing, and worldly success but grey ashes strewing his way, without her; that his soul would starve and his heart grow hard if she were not his wife. And this was why he had vowed to himself, long ago, even when she had refused him, that "he would have her yet."

And, with his arms round her, they sat on the rocks by the burn, and told each other "all about it."

Rush on, burn, madly over the rocks to the sea! sing on, birds, from the shadowing trees up to the peaceful sky! shine on, sun, to the receiving earth and human life! for to Norman and Ruby, by the burn-side, all the world is youth, and love, and one another!

CHAPTER XLVII.

LIFTING OF THE MIST.

"RUBY, I am going down to the boat this morning. Will you come, too?" inquired Dulcie the next morning.

"Yes, I will come. Auntie Bell is going too, I suppose?"

"Yes; I am expecting a parcel."

It was a brilliant November day, the sun was shining on the white heads of Goatfell and Ben Ghnuish.

After all, there was very little change in the three who stood on the quay awaiting the arrival of the steamboat. Miss Bell certainly did not sport blue ribbons on her bonnet, for she still wore black for Dulcie's husband, although he had been dead for more than a year, in compliment to her black robes they still wore mourning. But there was no possible reason for imagining that Miss Bell would not return to her favourite blue bonnet when the period of mourning should have expired.

Her face was not changed in the least. There was the same unsatisfactory complexion, that wanted "picking out" and colour; a plain face, with a sweet, quiet expression. She took, as of yore, a deep interest in the comings and goings of the steamer; and to-day was especially important, on account of Dulcie's expected parcel. "Stand round on the other side of me, dear," she said to Dulcie; "the wind is cold, and you will be a little sheltered by me." Her ever ready thought for others had never failed her yet, and would go with her to the end.

"Why, Auntie?" said Dulcie, laughing and not moving. "The wind will not be less cruel to you than to me."

And then the steamer came fussing and bustling close to the shore, and as the little boats went up alongside, it let off steam with a long-continued, agonising, hideous sound, most unpleasant to any ears within half a mile.

"Look at that poor old man!" cried Ruby, pointing to the little boat which was clinging to the side of the

steamer; "look how they let him tumble into the wee boat! There, they are helping him now. Poor old thing! I hope he did not hurt himself."

The little boat put out from the steamer, which turned about and puffed off round the point to Lamlash, leaving a great heaving swell in its train, and the poor little boat rode up and down with great, uneasy heaves, as it neared the shore.

"Look!" cried Ruby again, "there is that poor old man sick now. Unfortunate creature! how miserable he must be feeling! I hope he knows somebody who will meet him and take care of him as soon as he lands."

But Robert Hamilton and the rest were pulling in the boat with long, vigorous strokes; and as it came nearer and nearer to the little quay, Dulcie said to Ruby, "I say, Ruby, he isn't an old man at all—it isn't white hair, as we thought at first—it is flaxen. Ruby—do you see who it is?"

And in another moment Ruby recognised Merton Crawshaw. And a poor deplorable-looking object he was to recognise. His face was livid, and there was a greenish tint under his eyes, a reddish hue about the tip of his nose, his upper lip was turned back, the corners of his mouth were down, and his hat did not seem to become him, which, under the circumstances, was perhaps not to be wondered at.

Somebody helped him to dry land, and he stood helplessly shivering, and looking at nothing particular.

"Mr. Crawshaw, how do you do?" said Dulcie.

Ruby afterwards told her that this was an unkind question. But having stared at her for a moment, he held out his hand, saying—

"Oh, Mrs. Ingram! how d'ye do? Oh, what a boat!"

"I am afraid you have had a rough passage. Are you going to the hotel?"

"Yes; oh, hang everything! Get somebody to take me—yah!" And he sat down on a barrel, and shook his head, and made a frightful grimace. Ruby and Auntie Bell mercifully kept in the background, and Dulcie finding one of the hotel servants on the quay gave

Merton Crawshaw into his charge ; and, without attempting to speak to him or to get another word from him, Dulcie joined Ruby, who was trying to hide her laughter, which was very feeling and kind on her part.

Auntie Bell came up to them, triumphantly bearing Dulcie's parcel, which the other two had quite forgotten.

"By-the-by, Dulcie, what is it?" inquired Ruby.

"Ah! wait till we get home, and I will tell you."

Once more up at the House on the Hill, they opened the mysterious packet. It held two new red cloaks, very much like those that Ruby and Dulcie wore long ago.

"You know," she said, "that Uncle Donald is always wishing to see us in red cloaks again ; and I thought we might wear them now and then when we are scrambling about the glens and burns, just to please him." Then the baby attracted by the bright, glowing colour, ran in his own peculiar way up to them, and with a delighted cry threw his arms round the soft, thick cloth ; and Dulcie threw one of the cloaks all round him, and he walked up and down the room, from Auntie Bell to his mother, backwards and forwards, with the long cloak trailing after him, Auntie Bell regarding this performance—as she regarded all his performances—as an indication of a peculiarly elevated and aspiring mind. Of course, he ceaselessly caught his little fat feet and legs in the folds of the cloak, and rolled over in it, which apparently was half the enjoyment ; but notwithstanding that fact, at each tumble Auntie Bell's heart was in her mouth, and she would each time drop whatever she held in her hand in an agony of trepidation.

The news of Ruby's and Norman's engagement had given unfeigned pleasure to each one of the little home circle, beginning with his father, who had lately begun to fear that Norman was taking a fancy, as he called it, to "some stuck-up town lass." There were no doubts, no stumbling-blocks in the way, as in the case of poor Dulcie's engagement there had been ; and Norman left Arran the next day, with an understanding that when he came back for a few days at the new year the day was to *be fixed*.

They had just seen Norman off by the boat, when on passing the entrance to the hotel, Merton Crawshaw, in a long dressing-gown-looking coat, down to the heels, and banded round the waist, appeared with a light round hat and eyeglass. It was the first of those coats which had made its appearance in the island, and it took every eye with it as it went. Dulcie and Ruby gazed in astonishment, and it was some time before their eyes travelled up to the face of Merton Crawshaw.

"Miss Duncan! really it gives me such pleasure to see you—and Mrs. Ingram—and, why, Miss Young!—what an unexpected pleasure! I never thought of meeting you here!" said he.

"I hope that you are better to-day," remarked Dulcie.

"Thank you, I have quite got over it. Terrible sea you have here. Were you alone, Mrs. Ingram?"

"No; Ruby and Auntie Bell were with me."

"Miss Duncan, you were on that miserable little quay yesterday when I landed. I really felt horridly seedy—didn't quite know what I was doing—frightfully overcome by the tossing, and that sort of thing. Did—eh—did you see me?"

"Yes," said Ruby cheerfully.

"Hang it!" said he to himself; "I must have looked awful!"

There was a silence, and Ruby did not add to his pleasure by saying, "I did not speak to you, for I saw that you had been suffering from the liveliness of the waves; and I know how wretched that makes one feel."

He walked up to the house with them, and Miss Jean saw them approach from one of the windows, and calling Miss Bell to her side, she said—

"Bell, come here, and tell me what you call this—a man or a woman?"

"Mercy me!" said Miss Bell softly. "Deed, Jean, I'm no sure any way."

As they came into the house, Miss Jean added—

"Now, Bell, be smart and come downstairs, for you are to be introduced to an Englishman."

Almost the first thing Miss Jean said to him was, "And did ye get the philabeg, Mr. Crawshaw?"

"Ah, no, Miss—eh—Miss—so much occupied, but another time. And I should be so much obliged if you would tell me exactly what that is, it is such a strange word. I looked out for it in the dictionary, but it wasn't there."

"It must have been a most imperfect dictionary, or maybe it was an imperfect speller looking in it."

"Well, I thought this kind of thing would be more prudent just now," and the leg of a particularly tight-fitting pair of trousers appeared from the extraordinary wrapper.

"Why, you have not the kilt after all?"

"No, didn't you notice before? You saw this coat?"

"I should think I did. I noticed it particularly. But who in the world could guess what was under it?"

Merton Crawshaw then ventured a hope that some of the ladies would allow him to accompany them on a walk, as he was totally ignorant of the country, and he greatly desired to see it.

A party was made up of Auntie Bell, Ruby, Dulcie, and Alice, who were all ready to show off the beauties of the island.

"Dulcie," said Auntie Jean, with a bit of mischief sparkling in her keen eye, "now, if ye let this poor young man tumble into any of the burns, it will be a cruel thing."

"Auntie Jean!" was the answer, "how can you suggest such dreadful things? Of course we will take care of him," and there was an answering sparkle in Dulcie's eye.

"Great patience!" was Miss Jean's remark to herself as she watched them walking down the drive, "I'll never wonder again, when I hear talk of woman's rights. When men are come to this, and still our lords and masters, I'm thinking the women should take to something."

The road they went was rough. Dulcie led the way over rocks, walls, and burns. Ruby and Merton Craw-

shaw followed, and Alice and Auntie Bell closed the procession.

They arrived at a dashing, bold waterfall, which came through the wood, falling from the hills above. Dulcie, in her red cloak, leapt on to a great stone in the middle of the waters, and cried—

“Now, Mr. Crawshaw, we will show you what the Scotch girls do. We are going to follow up the burn on the rocks in the watercourse!”

“My dear lassie, take care! it is just a daft thing to do; but if you are bent upon it, I will follow you in the path beside the burn,” and Miss Bell started off.

“Come, Mr. Crawshaw, you are not afraid?”

Afraid! How could Merton Crawshaw say that he was afraid in the face of three girls who were already on the rocks in the burn, and turning round laughingly to him, and springing about, as he said to himself, “like a lot of confounded goats?”

He fixed his glass firmly in his eye, and springing boldly, his long skirts considerably in the way, he alighted on a stone covered with disagreeably slippery green moss.

“Here, Mr. Crawshaw, give me your hand! Do not stay on that slippery thing; you will not be able to balance yourself if you try till midnight. You must remember in future that it does not answer in burn climbing to stay on a small stone trying to balance yourself; you must only touch them with your feet, and off to the next, till you get to a safe one.”

For a short distance Dulcie assisted him, but presently she left him to manage as best he could; and, hot and nervous, he did his best to follow the girls, saying to himself, “How am I to talk to Miss Duncan or anybody in this ridiculous position? Fancy me placing myself in such an absurd predicament; flying in the face of Providence too! Break one’s legs!—I should think so—, break them all to splinters. Now, I call this awful downright awful!”

The girls were at some little distance ahead, and

Merton Crawshaw determined that he would have no more of it. Miss Bell's pathway here led by the burn, and she was coming towards it, so he made up his mind to join her.

"Miss—Miss !—do you think this is safe? I am going to join you if I may," said he.

Miss Bell came to a standstill and waited for him, as he tottered unsteadily over the stones towards her.

"I can't come any further ; I really can't !" he suddenly said.

There was a fearful pause. And then Miss Bell, who was the very personation of kindness, said—

"I will try and come near enough to give you a hand ; but please take care, for I am not very steady on these stones."

"If somebody does not help me I must remain here for ever," he said in a determined voice.

"Just look !" cried Ruby. "There is Auntie Bell going to Mr. Crawshaw's assistance!" and the three gathered on a group of rocks and sat down to see what would happen.

It was some time before Mr. Crawshaw could make up his mind to risk the step, even with Miss Bell's assistance ; but after several false starts he jumped. Only instead of getting on to the rock where Miss Bell expected to see him land, he made for her stone, and the next moment saw them wildly embracing one another ; with their arms clutching each other, they swayed and rocked to and fro for another moment, when Merton Crawshaw—to his honour be it said—awoke to the fact that one or the other was doomed to destruction and must fall ; then his inborn politeness came bravely ahead in this most trying time, and he staggered back, splashing furiously into the, luckily, shallow pool beneath.

A little higher up the burn three faces were buried in three handkerchiefs. Then Dulcie said, "What will Auntie Jean say?"

Alice remarked, "Well, I consider it very nice of him to sacrifice himself when he found that one must go."

"I don't," said Ruby. "He was bound to save Auntie Bell if he could."

"Wait a bit," said Dulcie. "They are both on dry land again, and he is covered with sand and water. Auntie Bell is washing him now with her handkerchief. Perhaps he would rather that we waited until he had recovered himself."

They were all most kind and sympathising when they returned to him; and, somewhat comforted, he resumed his place beside Ruby, and talked busily as they continued their homeward path, leaving the burn to its rocks and solitude.

"I really am so pleased to see you again," he said. "You left Hunstanleigh so very suddenly, that—that——"

"Yes, I had no time to say good-by to any one."

"Ah! to be sure. I wonder if it is true what I heard?" and hazarding a speculation, he said, "that you are engaged?"

"Engaged!" said Ruby.

"Yes, to be married, you know, and that sort of thing."

Ruby was embarrassed. It was a most straightforward question, and after a moment she said, "Yes, I am engaged to be married."

Merton Crawshaw had until then not been quite sure as to his intentions regarding Ruby. She certainly was the prettiest girl he had seen for some time; but she was clever. So the scales were almost equally balancing. No sooner did he find that she was out of his reach than down went the scale plump down on one side.

"Oh, Miss Ruby, what an unlucky devil I am! All this way—sea journey—all that sort of thing—all these risks—and then I find that in spite of everything I am nothing to you—engaged to another and that sort of thing."

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Crawshaw. I did not know that you were coming."

"You might have guessed I should come. I say, you weren't engaged when you were at Hunstanleigh?"

"No, I have only been engaged for two days."

"Two days ! Just the day before I came—a day too late, in point of fact ; and then I was sea-sick when you first saw me, but I really could not help that. I know I must have looked a fool, but I assure you I was not such a fool as I looked."

"Really, Mr. Crawshaw, I do not remember what you looked like ; let us talk of something else ;" and, waiting a moment or two till the others came up, she joined Dulcie, and left Alice to take her place beside him.

Alice sympathised with his dislike of Scotch burns in general, and complimented him on his gallantry in letting himself fall into the water instead of condemning Miss Bell to a cold bath, and altogether comforted his mind, and enabled him to bear his chilly frame and damp garments on the homeward road.

And when he had retired to the hotel to change his clothes, promising to return to high tea, Alice bethought herself that really he was a most good-hearted, honest sort of fellow. Norman Ruthven had been very nice and amusing whilst he was there ; but when Merton Crawshaw appeared, a sort of whiff of home came over her ; he was part and parcel of the old life at Hunstanleigh. His peculiarities were almost unnoticed by her ; indeed, he and she had been brought up to the same kind and habits of life ; and although these Scotch people were very nice in their way, the old life was what she had been accustomed to, after all. She had always heard good things of this young Crawshaw. Even in this silly adventure to-day in the burn, he had been polite and gentlemanly under trying circumstances, and she looked forward with pleasure to his coming in the evening.

"Dulcie," said Auntie Jean that evening, shortly before tea and the arrival of Merton Crawshaw, "which of you is he after ?"

"Who, Auntie ?"

"Thon creature in petticoats ; is he after you or Ruby ?"

"*Me*, Auntie !" and Dulcie's cheeks burnt hotly.

"Surely you must know, Auntie, that I shall never marry again."

"Nonsense !" said Miss Jean. "I don't mean to say that you need be thinking of it now ; but it is not to be supposed that a young creature like you is to be alone for the rest of her days !"

"Auntie Jean, the idea is utterly hateful. Never think again of the possibility of my marriage."

"Well, well ; never mind. And if he is after Ruby, he can but just find out that she is not to be had."

"Perhaps he is after Alice ?"

"Alice ! maybe. Perhaps English folk understand one another. He would suit her better than any of you. Maybe, Dulcie, he will take to Bell."

And later on, when the gentleman in question made his appearance, Miss Bell assailed him with many questions about his health since his tumble into the burn ; and gratified by her kind interest, he sat down beside her and chatted in the most friendly manner, with a good deal of assistance from his eyeglass.

"Dulcie, didn't I tell ye ?" whispered Miss Jean.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE PASSING OF A DREAM.

"I THINK," said Alice Young, when Merton Crawshaw had left that evening, "that we have been too bad in laughing at Mr. Crawshaw so much ; he is such a good fellow underneath it all."

"If he would only not have such queer coverings, then," said Miss Jean ; while Dulcie added, "You are quite right, Alice ; it is too bad of us to laugh at things he has done. Of course he is out of his element in this country ; and I am sure anybody would have looked dreadful after being sea-sick. I think he is a very nice young man."

Amongst themselves they made up their minds nor to laugh at any mistakes of Merton Crawshaw's

again, in case there might be anything between him and Alice.

And after a few walks and drives about the lovely scenery which lies about Brodick, Merton Crawshaw discovered that Alice Young, the companion that usually fell to his share, was a pleasant, pretty girl, not quite so clever as Miss Duncan perhaps, but that was in her favour. She was splendidly made, and walked well; Merton Crawshaw, by the aid of his eyeglass, soon satisfied himself of that fact; and as he walked beside her, he began to think whether "that wouldn't do?" There was but one drawback, which was, that his mother and all of them had planned this match, and wished it to come off; and to his mind there was something very humiliating in walking quietly into a noose that had been slung for you, and you aware of it the while. Then it occurred to him that it would be pleasant to show Miss Duncan that he was not wearing the willow; and in course of time there came a morning, a December morning, the last day but one of his visit in Arran, when Merton Crawshaw walked up the wintry road towards the old white house among the fir-trees, with his hands in the pockets of the long overcoat; and, as nobody was in sight, he sang lustily—

If she be not fair for me,
What care I how fair she be.

Up the hill he went, and rang the bell at the door, saying to himself as he waited for the door to be opened—

Shall I, wasting in despair,
Die because a woman's fair?

And, inspirited by these lively thoughts, in addition to the bright frosty air, he was unusually cheerful and pleasant; so much so, that Dulcie and Ruby, and in fact everybody in the house but Alice herself, knew the moment he appeared that he was armed for conquest, and that "something" might happen at any moment. Whether Alice knew this was uncertain. Dulcie said *that she* was quite certain that the baby knew all about

Merton Crawshaw's intentions. They gave him plenty of opportunity, so that the precise moment when he perpetrated the momentous question is unknown. But the same night Alice confided to Dulcie that she had made up her mind that she could be happy with Merton Crawshaw, and it pleased her to remember that Mrs. Ingram had wished this long ago ; she also heard that his family were anxious for the marriage.

And Dulcie made the best of it, and told Alice that she would never find any one really good enough for her ; but, as far as men went, " Merton Crawshaw was a very good fellow."

Soon after his departure, Alice began to grow restless at Arran, and to think it time that she travelled back to Lady Lawrence in London. They were all pleased at her engagement, and she was anxious to get amongst her adopted sisters, for she had an instinctive feeling that there her future husband and his position would be more appreciated.

But Dulcie half promised to go up to London for the marriage ; anyway, she wished her joy before she left Arran.

Miss Bell was in one continual flutter ; marriages were being made up all round, until it seemed impossible to say whose turn it would be next. Alice had no sooner left than they began to look out for Norman's promised day or two at the New Year.

Christmas passed quietly, and without him ; but, on the last day of the old year he came, and they all met him at the quay.

New Year's Night the whole party, including Harold Pierrepont, dined at Strathcraig, and Donald Ruthven said it had been the best New Year yet. He had long ago got over the disappointment about Dulcie, and his delight in the prospect of the marriage of Norman and Ruby was without fleck or flaw.

As they left the house to walk home, Norman and his father accompanied them, and Harold Pierrepont found himself leading the way with Miss Bell.

" Miss Bell, how the years go !" he said. " To think

that I knew that girl's mother! and there is Dulcie a widow with a child of her own!"

"Aye, Harold, ye knew her mother, and you know me now, and I am older than she was."

"Ah, to be sure! Time is going, life is going; and, somehow, I have missed the good in it."

"No, Harold; do not say that. You have worked hard, and fame has come to you."

"I call that but one of the good things. It does not satisfy one. I suppose nothing ever does—but—well, I should like the chance of trying whether I should be satisfied if I got what I wanted."

"And can you not get it, Harold?" Miss Bell found happiness in walking along in the dark night beside him; and as he spoke there was a deep yearning in his tone that stirred her very heart; and she felt that he, for whom she would even now have sacrificed anything, was suffering. If only fate would be so kind as to put it in her power to help him somewhat, even were it to bring suffering to herself!

"No, I cannot get it; and I sometimes think if I knew that I could get my happiness, I would not stretch out my hand to take it."

"What do you mean, Harold?"

"Listen, Miss Bell. I have cared somewhat for different people at different times of my life, naturally enough. I have lived a wandering, purposeless life. I never knew fully what life meant till I came back to Scotland three years ago. Then, like a dream—no, it wasn't a dream—for, once there, it never left me; but like a tearing aside of curtains, cobwebs, and rust from my brain, I came to know what life could be, and I knew that I never before loved."

The road before them seemed to Miss Bell to be dancing and heaving, and his voice sounded as half heard through her sleep.

"Even from the first," he continued, "I felt that there was too great a difference in age."

Miss Bell meekly bowed her head.

"Then, whilst I was still dreaming of what might be,

I woke up to the fact that she loved, even as I loved; but it was not I that she loved, it was another."

"No!" cried Miss Bell, "she never loved another."

"What! do you mean to say that Dulcie did not love Ingram?"

"Dulcie!"

"Yes; did I not say that it was Dulcie—none other? but any man would love her! and was it likely that she, who could pick from the whole world, should care for a great rough fellow like me?"

It is true that we all have to suffer in turn, and we know so little when our hour is to come. Like the thief in the night, it steals on us unawares; attacking us when we are most vulnerable, most defenceless. Some cry, "Help me! my burden is greater than I can bear;" others suffer and are strong; those who are faint of heart lie down and die. There are some who are helped to endure trouble by the very knowledge that others are suffering in a like way.

And so it was with Miss Bell. The thrust had been a death-blow; it broke upon her head with strong, unswerving force, dealt her by the very hand she loved the most.

And whilst he continued his tale, feeling sure of her usual ready sympathy, she was saying to herself, "Dulcie, my bairn, whose life I spoilt! and Harold, whom I love! surely, surely, I can do anything for them; surely I can sacrifice all I have—for them!"

"Harold, I will do what I can for you," she said at length; I know that she has now no idea of marrying again; but wait, wait, and I will tell you if there is any chance by-and-by."

"Dulcie," whispered Ruby that night, "Norman and I are to be married in the end of April, when the birds begin to sing; I wanted it to be May, but May is an unlucky month."

"I am so pleased, old darling! Are you entirely happy?"

"So happy that I shall be always listening for the birds' sweet voices."

FAREWELL.

It is two years since we have seen them, and we will take our farewell peep at them in the moonlight.

It is the first night of the New Year, and there is a small house beside the road which looks not unlike a Christmas card, from the ruddy glow of fires and lights which shine from out it into the moonlight. Just without the porch, bareheaded in the moonlight, stood a strong upright figure—it was Norman Ruthven, watching the departing guests. Half in the moonlight and half in the lamplight was Donald Ruthven, his attention divided between the departing guests and the figure beside him. This other figure stood just inside the hall in the lamplight—it was Ruby, who, instead of looking from the door, was gazing with all her eyes and heart at the sleeping child which she held in her arms.

The New Year dinner party went on in the same routine as it had done for years, with this change, that Ruby was Ruby Ruthven now, and Auntie Bell and Auntie Jean walked off to the House on the Hill, leaving her behind at Strathcraig, which, when she and Norman could steal away from dingy Glasgow, was their home. And Donald Ruthven said that he had nothing left to wish for.

But the guests were round the corner, and out of sight, and Ruby turned and went back to the fireside, Norman following her as she went. Then the old man with the still energetic, healthy, happy face, with one more look out into the night, closed the door, and all became silent in the little house, which was guarded by the chain of solemn mountain peaks standing up darkly in the moonlight.

Follow along the moonlit road the departing guests. On in front is Dulcie ; and beside her Harold Pierrepont, who is carrying little Maurice, lying asleep upon his shoulder.

There is an earnest conversation between these two, terribly earnest to Harold Pierrepont, who says to him-

self that he is risking his all on the die of these words, and oh ! what feeble colourless words he feels that they are—so insufficient, so impotent !

And yet not so insufficient as he imagines them to be. Time has cured a great wound, and Dulcie only remembers how she liked him, how she trusted him, even from the first. Is it impossible to be happy again ? And she is weary of being alone.

Harold Pierrepont recalls the moonlight New Year's night five years ago, when he and she walked home from the Ruthvens, when Dulcie asked him to intercede for her first love, and how he thought that the brightness of life had slipped by and he had had none of it. If he had but known !—if he had but known ! how patiently he could have waited those five years ; for, as he stands beside the porch of the house with the unspellable Gaelic name, Dulcie has promised to love him and to marry him, and he is twenty-two years older than she is.

And surely happiness will come to them both, for the tall strong man is firm of purpose, honourable and straightforward in all his dealings. If his life has hitherto been a failure, it was from no fault of his. With the talents which God gave him he has worked and struggled ceaselessly with a never-lowered aim, and he has not laboured in vain, for his name stands high, and before the work of his busy hand men stand and rejoice, saying, "How that man feels and loves Nature !" To him has been given the most blessed of all gifts, the power of understanding the beautiful. And he has shown his thankfulness for the gift by cultivating to the utmost his talent for depicting it unto others.

The latter years had passed away, taking their shadows with them ; but was it possible that things had righted themselves for him, even as they had gone wrong ? Was it possible that his dream could be realised ? Was it possible that all his waiting and sorrow had been but a lesson, teaching him how better to appreciate the happiness that was in store for him ? For Dulcie, in her red cloak—as he first saw her—has promised to join her life to his.

He walked beside her with utterance failing him, but saying to himself—"Words, they but render half the heart; deeds, they are poor to our rich will." He only realised each moment yet more fully, that life would be as gloriously near to perfection and entire satisfaction as mortals can attain unto.

Together they entered the house, and waited in the wee parlour.

The fir-trees up behind the house rustled and quivered in the frosty air, whispering together, "Hope and Love never die."

A white owl flew over the burn out of the wood; it settled softly over Dulcie's window, and muttered, "Lovers again!—over again! nothing new, nothing to learn but Death." It blinked its eyes and flew back to the wood, low down under the trees.

The burn plashed through the wood; and, whilst it passed the house, it babbled, "Live your day, and rejoice while ye may!" and on it went, over the mossy stones, past the heather banks, to the sea.

All was quiet for a time on the hill-side, and then two figures slowly came up the hill, talking as they came—Auntie Jean and Auntie Bell. They know what is happening to the two who have preceded them. They know that their last bairn is to leave them, and that the two old aunties are to dwell alone at last. They have one hope, and that is that little Maurice Ingram will be left a good deal with them in the days that are coming. They know that joy and happiness are within the house, waiting their presence; but Auntie Jean and Auntie Bell walk slowly, for their hearts are heavy.

They lingered and aided one another in the closing of the old green gate, and Miss Jean said, "Do ye remember, Bell, long ago, when it was the law that the weans were not to go beyond this gate, and when we were out they would hang on and wait for us to come back, and all the way up the hill we would see the round, wee faces looking over?"

They walked silently, side by side, up the gravel path, till Miss Bell said, "Jean, do ye mind when the chil-

dren's wee feet were going patter patter up and down here? How we used to scold them for kicking the gravel on to the grass!"

They loitered together at the house-door, and Miss Jean said, "How the door would be always opening and shutting! but I'm thinking, Bell, that for the future—there will be only you and I."

When the door had closed on them, the ugly white dwelling seemed to fall asleep in the moonlight, lulled by the voices of the night, murmuring, "Peace be unto this house."

THE END.

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